



# This Year in Jerusalem: Israel and the Literary Quest for Jewish Authenticity

## Citation

Hoffman, Ari. 2016. This Year in Jerusalem: Israel and the Literary Quest for Jewish Authenticity. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences.

## Permanent link

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:33840682>

## Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

## Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.  
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

This Year in Jerusalem: Israel and the Literary Quest for Jewish Authenticity

A dissertation presented

By

Ari R. Hoffman

To

The Department of English

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In the subject of

English

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

August 15, 2016

© 2016 Ari R. Hoffman  
All rights reserved.

Ari Hoffman

Dissertation Advisor: Professor Elisa New  
Professor Amanda Claybaugh

*This Year in Jerusalem: Israel and the Literary Quest for Jewish Authenticity*

This dissertation investigates how Israel is imagined as a literary space and setting in contemporary literature. Israel is a specific place with delineated borders, and is also networked to a whole galaxy of conversations where authenticity plays a crucial role. Israel generates authenticity in uniquely powerful ways because of its location at the nexus of the imagined and the concrete. While much attention has been paid to Israel as a political and ethnographic/demographic subject, its appearance on the map of literary spaces has been less thoroughly considered. Ultimately, I suggest that even at the most granular level of description and analysis, Israel is always a partly imagined space, saturated with signification. By using Israel as a case study and uniting critical discourses on literary space and cultural authenticity, this project argues for a central role for literature in the consideration of contemporary hot-button issues across politics and identity.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction	1-30
II. Israel(s)	31-105
i.    The Dig	31-42
ii.   The Kibbutz	42-55
iii.  The Settlement	56-102
III. Journeys	103-150
i. <i>Aliyah</i>	110-130
ii. <i>Tiyul</i>	130-136
iii. <i>Yeridah</i>	136-145
IV. Where Are We?	146-154
V. Works Consulted	155-160

For my parents, without whom nothing is possible. For Hannah, Josh, and Celine, constant sources of inspiration and fun. For my grandmother, whose love and strength are astonishing. For B, and Peggy.

## Introduction

Three millennia ago, through a combination of historical happenstance and prayer, the Temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt under the aegis of King Cyrus of Persia, spelling an end to the first diaspora, the sojourn in Babylon. It had been a ruin for just seventy years, having previously been destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The beginning of the Book of Ezra and Nehemiah narrates the festive occasion of its rededication. The crowd was a robust one; 42,360 people attended, a good turn out for a Yankees game in July.

Those who trekked back to Jerusalem were disappointed with what they saw; the dimensions were not quite as grand as they had been before, the ark containing the crushed remnants of the Ten Commandments had never resurfaced. The many more who remained in Babylon were not even tempted to return. Their lives were better there, a cosmopolitan city of the world, than in an unknown backwater like Jerusalem. This, the very first return from the very first diaspora, is presented as both redemptive and disappointing. The Jews who did come back from Babylon brought with them names of the months that they learnt there, ensuring that the days to be counted off until the end of history would be called under a foreign name.

We are not quite at the end of history, despite predictions to the contrary, yet it might be said that two great Jewish dreams were achieved in the second half of the twentieth century. The first was the achievement of an affluent, powerful, and secure diaspora community in the United States. The second was the restoration of sovereignty in the ancestral homeland of *Eretz Yisrael*. These dual developments have significantly complicated both dreams, and it is the literary attempts to wrestle with the implication of these dizzying events that comprise the most exciting developments in contemporary Jewish fiction.

While this study will not explicitly venture into the vast terrain of Jewish thought on Diaspora, the richness of that context is an important interlocutor. *Galut* and *Geulah*, Exile and Redemption, have been powerful lodestars of the traditional Jewish imagination. The Return to Zion has long been an imaginative and messianic hope, for Jews from Philadelphia to Fez. Contemporary thinkers like James Clifford and Paul Gilroy have expanded the diaspora to other communities and experiences, and specifically Jewish thinkers like Arnold Eisen and DeKoven Ezrahi have considered the contemporary life of diaspora in a time when Jewish sovereignty has been reestablished. This development has heightened rather than attenuated the status of diaspora, as the improbability of the Return to Zion coexists with a palpably unredeemed world. Within this maelstrom, DeKoven Ezrahi explains “Different literary strategies replace the deferred, *u-topian* imagination of place with the topos of an actual, physical presence” (Lerner, 308). Where the actual meets the deferred, there we are.

From the time Abraham first trudged out of his tent somewhere in modern day Iraq for a small sliver of land along the Mediterranean, a not insignificant part of what it meant to be a Jew was to have a relationship with territory. The first word for Jew was territorially derived: *ivri*, someone from the other side of the river. One of the Hebrew names for God is *makom*, or place. The particular place that has mattered to Jews for as long as there have been Jews is the Land of Israel. This analysis seeks to bind together theoretical conversations on space and authenticity, with the goal of crafting a portrait that mirrors how Israel actually functions in Jewish life and letters. This can be achieved through an old-new approach that lives at the intersection of the imagined and the concrete. Israel is constituted at this intersection, and this study likewise situates itself in a literary space that is implicated in other arenas.



It is almost a commonplace that the land on which the current-day state of Israel sits has been coveted for so long, by so many, because of its strategic location at the crossroads of continents and the confluence of trading routes. In the Jewish imagination it has always been a terminus rather than a byway, and geopolitical factors have conspired to make that true in other senses as well. Various arrangements of cold peace and troubled borders, not to mention military aggression and economic boycott, have left Israel regionally isolated rather than contiguously networked. Its closest ally is an ocean away and many have argued that its strategic and economic future lies in the Far, rather than the near, East.

Israel is a country at the intersection of continents that nevertheless finds itself regionally isolated and a touchstone for debates and news coverage worldwide. At the heart of this study is the conviction that Israel is a space, concrete and imagined but also literary, that like a magnet attracts and holds the most important conversations about Jewish authenticity. These conversations are multiple and crisscrossing. They happen within American Jewry, between American Jews and Israel, and among Israelis working through their relationship to the Jewish State.

Israel is a specific place with delineated borders, and is also networked to a whole galaxy of conversations where authenticity plays a crucial role. *Israel is a place that generates authenticity in uniquely powerful ways because of its location at the nexus of the imagined and the concrete.* The exact terms of the link between space and authenticity is difficult to pinpoint, but it is predicated on Israel's dual-identity as both a place and an idea. The specifically literary approach pursued here sings this same song, as it treats Israel as a constructed fictional environment while also understanding that there are always byways back into the 'real world.'

Once the two thousand year old dream was fulfilled, what did it mean to choose not to participate? This is a question Israel has posed to American Jews, and American Jewry has consistently asked itself. To an extent that would earlier have seemed unimaginable, Israel has come to define Jewish American life. Thus, the physical space of the State of Israel takes up significant ideological space in terms of how American Jewry organizes its commitments and sets its priorities. The most contentious issue, of course, is the question of just how much space Israel should take up. On one level, this is a debate over borders, the lines on a map and the facts on the ground that delineate the 'ours' and 'not-ours.' From another frame, there is a larger debate to be had about the space Israel takes up in the world, in the media, and in the content of contemporary Jewish life.

Israel is an improbable and astonishing place that is equal parts Rorschach test and fecund generator of avatars and visions of how a people should be in a place. Israel is especially ripe and particularly challenging to this type of analysis; it punches above its weight. It is territorially small but symbolically enormous. Space is, of course, multi-dimensional, and this study will focus on Israel as a literary space where issues of authenticity are located and dislocated. While much attention has been paid to Israel as a political and ethnographic/demographic subject, its appearance on the map of literary spaces has been less thoroughly considered. Ultimately, I suggest that even at the most granular level of description and analysis, Israel is always a partly imagined space, saturated with signification.

While this project dives deep into literary texts that adumbrate Israel and animate issues in Jewish authenticity, it owes much to those theorists who first marked the terrain of literary space. What has been called “a turn to spatiality” in literary studies has provided a rich set of terms for the presence of space in literature. Thinkers like Foucault, Bachelard, Bachelot, Tally,

Westphal, and Moretti have done important work in exploring how texts make and take up space. These portals have in turn been vital in investigations into post-colonial studies, conceptions of world literature, and diaspora interests.

### **Dimensions of Space**

While this study will be more interested in practically poking around the kinds of Israel-spaces than in dwelling in the tents of theory, a flyover of the terrain is in order. A useful starting point is Michel Foucault's "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." While Foucault opens up several vistas, a key component of his argument is the shift from a time-centered paradigm to a space-concerned outlook. "The present epoch," he observes, "will perhaps above all be the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and interests with its own skein." Space retains a relation to time, but it scrambles it and discards sequence in favor of a baroque and far-flung spatiality that pulls apart and squishes together.

Barbara E. Mann's *Space and Place in Jewish Studies* does important work in bringing together this body of critical work with a distinctly Jewish language. For Mann, the critical term here is *Makom*, the Hebrew term for "place" which she puts in relation to the spatial turn mentioned above. Mann helpfully points out that *makom* can toggle between a specific place, a more generic word for space, and at its highest level it functions as a term for God, who is both everywhere and nowhere.

This notion of a space as a site of both presence and absence is, as Mann demonstrates, central to the Jewish imagination, centered on continual evocation of the Temple in Jerusalem

and to a lesser extent the Garden of Eden, both of which are central in absentia. While these ancient ideas of space continue to exert an imaginative pull, as Mann rightfully notes “Modern Zionism may also be understood as a collision of space’s material and abstract faces, between the physical reality of the modern Middle East and biblical stories about the ancient Land of Israel”(14).

This notion of ‘collision’ echoes throughout the space that is Israel, and the entrance of characters into this zone is often marked with a kind of impact, a shock of difference and a residual pull of recognition. In practice, though, there are various kinds of collisions, and they sometimes present more accurately as troubled continuities. A settlement is both linked to Israel and a site where American identity can be reassessed. An archaeological dig both excavates the past and spotlights the present. And a security outpost in southern Lebanon suggests trends for the entirety of the troubled and tragic space of the Middle East.

Israel has taken up a disproportionate amount of room in the Jewish spatial imagination. For the overwhelming amount of its history, the critical mass of Jewish life and thought happened outside of Israel, and yet it was a very present if off-stage space. Looked toward and imagined, a repository of hopes constantly and intimately imagined yet also definitively distant.

While George Steiner’s “Our Homeland the Text” argued for the Jewish book as the preeminent place of the Jewish imagination, and Amos Oz’s “Jews and Words” similarly argues that it is text lines rather than borderlines that delineate the space of Jewish tradition, there is a broad and consequential trajectory that involves a relationship with a specific place, albeit one that has been subject to a thousand imaginings and been put to a thousand uses. We are both at a deep into and just starting out on this subject. Jews have been imagining this place for two

millennia, yet a people without political sovereignty for that long is just gaining fluency in literal and political space.

The roughly fifty years encompassed here, weighted towards the last twenty-five, have contained a variety of conflicting trends. Support for Israel among American Jews has largely stayed steady but has eroded among certain segments. On the level of geo-politics, consistent support from US Administrations has not precluded the eruptions of tensions and occasional divergence of interests. Israel itself has changed dramatically; the persistence of regional challenges and the ongoing controversy in the West Bank of the Jordan River should not obscure shifts in Israeli public opinion and in the nature of that populace itself. The settler population has grown, and in the face of increased regional threats and instability one can foresee both increased cooperation with the United States as well as divergences as Israel becomes less interested in the kind of negotiated peace accord the United States view as strategically favorable.

These broad contexts should delineate but not define the stance(s) Jewish American literature adopts towards depicting and digesting Israel as setting and subject. At its inception in the early twentieth century, this literature was energized by the immigrant experience, the encounters between individuals and foreign cultures and the 'faithful houses' they made together, to paraphrase the blessing given to a new couple. With the growing and by now complete acclimatization of Jews into American culture, where they've won primaries if not the presidency, new subjects have been generated and new styles pioneered. However, that contact with a certain kind of 'otherness' has been lost. Israel, culturally different, younger than the United States yet deploying ancient Jewish tropes, is an opportunity to find an interlocutor a bit prickly on the outside, but possessed of potentially sweet and significant synergies. These complexities will be examined more fully in this study's conclusion.

The break up of consensus over Israel makes the project of imagining the country more rather than less urgent. Israel is not just one of many positions adopted by the differing, overlapping, and multiplying camps that comprise the Jewish American scene; it is the subject that determines their formation and configuration.

What makes this subject especially ripe for reassessment is the rapidity and scale of the changes that have reset both the American Jews doing the imagining and the space being imagined. Dov Waxman, Steven Cohen, and Elliot Abrams have all studied the quantitative and qualitative ways in which American Jewry has morphed, launching new critiques and defending old ramparts. Diana Pinto entitles her recent study, *Israel Has Moved*, and the tense here is vital, as Israel is a space that morphs and shifts with great rapidity. This is true on a large scale, with Israel's border both perpetually in flux and holding constant due to stalled peace negotiations. But it is also true on a more micro-scale as well, for the settlement, the kibbutz, and the streams of *aliyah* and *yeridah*

Israel is part of Jewish American identity and radically differentiated from it, both contiguous and contrasting. It has its own language, stories, culture, and trajectory. At the same time, the interconnected nature of information and politics, as well as its moniker as 'The Jewish State,' make it a space that is both dense and diffuse, radiating outward to touch bucolic college campuses, venerable synagogues in Paris, co-ops in Brooklyn, and municipal elections in Birmingham.

In a certain sense, this is a set of new realities that leads to a conviction for the necessity for an approach that seek to yoke together people and place from a fresh angle. However, the ground below this study of space is very ancient, formed from the frameworks of diaspora and exile, homeland and redemption. All of these terms are themselves veritable sites of cultural and

theological archaeology, and contemporary theorists like Paul Gilroy and James Clifford have added to the labor of countless others, ancient and modern. ‘Space’ and ‘authenticity’ are both remarkably imprecise terms for such important concepts, but when they converge a basic truth emerges. Israel, with its old/new chronology, wildly freighted significance, and fusion of the concrete and the imagined, is particularly well suited to literature on the one hand, with its imagined people and worlds, and a study of authenticity on the other.

Just as cutting edge theoretical research into the quantum properties of space has revealed an ever-proliferating number of dimensions, so too there are a multiplicity of theoretical approaches to space that emerge not from equations but from the study of literary texts. A central one for this study is Soja’s notion of a ‘third space’ that is both concrete and imagined, a kind of compound. I use Soja’s thesis in two ways. First, due to its tremendous significance to a wide range of stakeholders, Jewish, non-Jewish, and global, Israel is *always* a third space, both over-determined and a proxy for the widest range of convictions. It is, in the words of Aaron David Miller’s recent diplomatic history, ‘the much too promised land.’

Even while traditional Jewish thought structured itself around the binaries of diaspora and homeland, exile and redemption, it also encoded a third-space status around Israel. The actual terrain never stopped being treasured, and the thrice-daily turn towards Jerusalem as the crow flies very much signaled a set of concrete coordinates. At the same time, the strain of the yearning could never be attributed solely to the desire to buy a boat ticket to Jaffa. Rather, it was for a redeemed, rebuilt Jerusalem that would reverse history by going back to the future, ‘renewing our days as of old.’ To this end, Jerusalem was split into Upper and Lower, the heavenly and the earthly, the imagined and the concrete always in relation. A contemporary exegete of this pluralism is the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai, who asks

Why is Yerushalayim plural

One on high and one below?

.....

I want to live in one “Yerushal”

Because I am just “I” and not “I’s” Open *Closed Open*

For Amichai, the desire to collapse Jerusalem’s multiplicity is not messianic but the opposite. He wants to heal its political and ethnic divisions but also restore its concreteness, and revoke its status as a third space: one Jerusalem, rather than a choice between a higher and lower one. Amichai intimates that there is something dangerous about this conjunction. He sets the authentic and indivisible self in contrast with the ability of a charged space like Jerusalem to proliferate and spin off dreams and visions. If, as Soja explains, “spatiality is either seen as concrete material forms to be mapped, analyzed, and explained; or as mental constructs, ideas about representations of space and its social significance,” then Amichai prioritizes the concrete. But Israel is the ultimate third space, compounding both binaries and also yielding a new kind of territory. In a review that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, Matti Friedman imagines “a Temple priest, pausing mid-sacrifice, sighing as he glances at the earthly Jerusalem over the wall” (4/1/2016). If anything, this divide is accentuated to an even greater extent now, where the Temple has to be fully imagined, and is honored only in the breach.

Throughout, however, Israel also functions as a third space in more specific and discrete ways. The signal example is the settlements, which both very much share in this imagined-concrete hybrid status while also identifying as third spaces in another, political sense. Technically, they are populated by Israeli citizens who remain outside of Israel, maintained by a



different legal regime despite being only ten minutes away from downtown Jerusalem. This ambiguous legal status is held in tension with the fervent beliefs of their Jewish inhabitants, who maintain that they are living in the ‘true’ Biblical heartland.

This third space status is accentuated here by a focus on Americans in the settlements, who engage in a more complex triangulation. For them, Israel serves as a third space positioned in relation to both Israel and the United States. In the villages of Efrat and Alon Shvut, new continuities and revisions are being made to trajectories that began in Brooklyn and Cleveland. Freed of the arduous and un-thrilling fate of navigating Hebrew in the aisles of the supermarkets of Tel Aviv, they find a more vivid form of Jewish authenticity in territories disputed and disputatious.

The theoretical nub of this project is located at the point where person and place meet, and what the Jewish State has done to, with, and for the Jews. Here, Soja’s notion of a ‘Third Space’ finds its counterpoint in Benedict Anderson’s conception of an ‘imagined community.’

In a footnote towards the middle of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, he disaggregates Zionism and the founding of the State of Israel. Anderson explains,

The significance of the emergence of Zionism and the birth of the state of Israel is that the former marks the reimagining of an ancient religious community as a nation, down there among the other nations- while the latter charts an alchemic change from wandering devotee to local patriot (149).

For Anderson, of salience to both Zionism and the state to which it eventually gave rise is this ‘alchemy’ that turns continuity into newness, and ‘reimagines’ both the larger national community and the individual of which it is comprised. If, as Anderson claims, “the fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, “ then the Jewish project of

sovereignty audibles that destiny, re-directing the nomadic members of an ‘ancient religious community’ into the throng of modern nationalisms.

Anderson’s focus on transformation in his analysis of Zionism locks in with the understanding of nationalism as a whole that underpins the book. This, from the introduction,

I will be trying to argue that the creation of these artifacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces; but that once created, they became ‘modular,’ capable of being transplanted (4)

Anderson’s work has and continues to be of enormous influence, and it finds great salience in the Israeli context and as a frame for the ongoing violence between Israel and the Palestinians. These are two national communities of relatively recent vintage soldered together with liberal amounts of imaginative mortar. As Gershom Gorenberg explains in his review of Lev Luis Grinberg’s *Politics and Violence in Israel/ Palestine*, the contested and uncertain nature of Israel’s borders allows an unbounded and volatile place to the contours of the imagined. Not having clear borders means having too many of them, drawn both individually and ethnically, a recipe for conflict and rich stew for the novelist.

While Anderson’s work roams over the fields of political science, intellectual history, comparative anthropology, and many others besides, it is not explicitly engaged with fiction or literary theory. In fiction, of course, everything is imagined, but by ‘fictionalizing’ such ideas as the nation and the national community, Anderson does important work in bringing together territory and the imagination, the space of the nation and the place of the mind.

In a salient postscript for those concerned with imagined spaces as well as imagined communities, Anderson writes in a new Afterward that the first translation of *Imagined*

*Communities* into Hebrew was undertaken by the Open University in Israel, a distance university whose coursework and content is broadcast entirely online. Anderson notes that the translation was “intended as a critical intervention against prevailing Zionist-Likudist orthodoxy.” The ironies here are not coincidental. A book about the construction of nationalism is translated into the resurrected language of a new Jewish nationalism by a cyber-university with no campus or territorial center, as a way of striking against a politics and ideology of territorial maximalism.

One of the interesting ways in which Israel functions in the literary texts examined here is that it is rarely a nationalist cause. Aside from a sustained exploration of literature that depicts the settlements, and in a different sense the literatures of *aliyah* and *yeridah*, these novels imagine communities in more idiosyncratic ways. One way to get at this might be a line from an article that recently appeared in the newspaper *The Forward*, by the writer and memoirist Shulem Deen. “I am an Israel-phile. But I am not a Zionist. I love Israel like I love a good falafel; non-ideologically. Not because I *must*- I simply do.” Importantly, however, even Deen’s falafel faith is rooted in landscape. “The Judean desert, the hills of Jerusalem, the Mediterranean coast. It was all there then. It’s all here now.”

This is the way many of the characters here experience Israel; a pull remembered and imagined, often apart from the particulars of Israeli politics but tangent to the larger claims and frames of the Zionist narrative. One particularly fictional memorable visitor to Israel was the redoubtable Alexander Portnoy.

## **Authenticity**

We don't know much about the weather conditions at takeoff, but we do know visibility was high for Alexander Portnoy's descent into Tel Aviv's old Lod Airport, and that he probably had a window seat, or at least hustled over to one. "My face is against the window," Portnoy relates in *Portnoy's Complaint*, Philip Roth's classic from 1969, and he looks down "from two thousand feet in the air upon the land of Israel, where the Jewish people first came into being, and am impaled upon a memory of Sunday morning softball games in Newark" (244). The headwinds rush Portnoy to a full appreciation of the Zionist project, where "in this country, everybody is Jewish." The tailwinds take him back to the New Jersey context that remains definitive for him, never more so than when he is far away. The entire chapter throbs with the push and pull Israel can exert for a Jewish American visitor. Portnoy feels elated by Israel's Jewish milieu, and profoundly alienated by its cultural difference, not to mention his failed sexual experience with Naomi, an Israeli soldier.

Portnoy's trip to Israel is one of the most notorious passages in Jewish American literature, and while Claudia Roth Pierpoint reports that to this day it makes Roth "squirm," because of its excessive caricature, it is a resonant moment. To be sure, Portnoy was neither the first nor the last American Jew to arrive in Israel and be both fascinated by Hebrew society and reconfirmed in his American identity. But *Portnoy's Complaint* was released in the watershed year of 1967, which also saw the Six Day War, a conflict that would remake Israel and forever alter its relationship to American Jewry. In this sense, Portnoy's flight was a kind of maiden voyage on the most important route in the contemporary Jewish map.

Roth's caricature makes a claim. Portnoy and Naomi, the Israeli *sabra* who he meets and tries to sleep with, are two kinds of Jews who speak two entirely different languages. Their encounter suggests that there is conflict between the Israeli and the American Jew. Israel is both

the stage for this encounter and a kind of reacting agent for it, a homeland that makes the diaspora more vivid and conspires with Roth's prose to make everyone a more vibrant version of themselves. Portnoy's distress intimates that assertions of authenticity and aspersions of inauthenticity lie at the heart of how Jewish Americans relate to Israel, as both concrete and imagined place in life and letters.

Roth wrote *Portnoy's Complaint* nearly fifty years ago, and since then Israel has become ever more debated and discussed. This project, however, proceeds from a conviction that despite the extraordinary amount of coverage Israel receives in the media and in the pages of polemics, it actually continues to be understudied as an imaginative, conceptual, and ideological force. As Steven Katz observes, "there is not even one major post-1948 work emanating either from the diaspora or Israel, which offers a satisfying Jewish philosophical account of Zionism and Jewish nationalism" (*Studies in Jewish Philosophy*, 94). Substitute 'literary' for 'philosophical,' and 'Jewish American' for 'Jewish' and you have something like the argumentative space this project hopes to occupy. Close readings will yield wide vistas, just as a tiny country the size of New Jersey takes up so much space above and below the fold. At the same time, the toggling between the narrow end and the wide mouth produces a sound that rings true to the tangled skeins of identity today.

Authenticity has always been there and is a late-breaking development of the modern age. This is true in the Jewish context as well. In the broadest possible strokes, the possibility of assimilation and an exclusively secular identity, as well as the rise of a multitude of religious denominations allowed for an impossibly wide range of ways to 'be' Jewish. As Jonathan Sacks notes, Judaism is in the most important ways still captive to the traumas of its encounter with the Enlightenment and secularism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which introduced a seam into what

had been a fairly straightforward traditionalism. The proliferation of ‘cultural,’ ‘religious,’ and even ‘gastronomic’ Judaisms speak to both the enormous pie of Jewish identity and the temptation to help oneself to just one slice of it.

My contention here is that the establishment of the State of Israel and the simultaneous thriving of American Jewry in the post-war years provoked another conflict, if not crisis, over authenticity. The appearance of a ‘Jewish State’ in the ancient Jewish homeland speaking Hebrew as its language necessarily changes how American Jews think about the strengths and limitations of their own culture. Or not: in some ways one of the most startling developments has been the paucity of friction and the maintenance of an authentic Jewish Identity in America through engagement rather than relocation. The mechanics of this involve philanthropy, political involvement in the form of lobbying groups like JStreet and AIPAC, and visits to Israel on Birthright and gap year programs.

The texts explored here are set against this terrain, but they intervene at moments when the dynamics become a little more acute and continuities and contrasts are both etched more boldly. Central to nearly every dimension of the subject of Israel in the Jewish American imagination is the notion of authenticity. The old and resonant categories of exile, diaspora, and homecoming abide in the background, but I argue that the lives and quests of the characters- and to some degree their authors- are governed less by the hard rhythms, rough tides and intoxicating deferred dreams of these ancient paradigms than by a distinctly contemporary interest in authenticity, a fixation which is itself a product of the distinctive conditions of the American diaspora in our day.

Several factors have conspired to grant authenticity this pride of place. As the 2013 Pew report has shown (“A Portrait of Jewish Americans”), American Jewry’s demographics and

communal opinions are changing rapidly, and new forms elicit new anxieties and old fears.

While many of these convulsions are internal to the complex challenges of being Jewish within a changing America, a vivid subset of them is activated by its encounter with the Jewish State, which retains its own rich dialectics of Jewish authenticity and citizenship. The range of texts that comprise this study amount to an extended and fractitious conversation over the models of authenticity available to Jews born in the second century of the American diaspora and the first of the Jewish State.

One challenge that might be anticipated right off the bat is the yoking together of Israeli and Jewish American literature. It could be argued that Israel is tangential or irrelevant to a study of Jewish American literature, or indeed Jewish American life. Furthermore, the claim could be made that there is something forced about conflating the two, that differences are more salient than points of contact and that the broad stream of Jewish American literature demands more local and relevant interlocutors. All of this is true enough, and surely the approach adopted here is just one pathway into a very broad subject. Still, it possesses several virtues. First, it enlarges the context within which we read Jewish American literature while also retaining the texture of a series of local contexts. Second, it allows for the exploration of a ‘the Jewish world,’ a term that is often discussed in non-literary discourses but rarely makes its way into Jewish American literary parlance. Together, the United States and Israel account for the vast majority of world Jewry by virtually every metric, including the demographic, philanthropic, and cultural. Touching on the literatures of both amplifies the resonance of the claims and concerns. Third, I argue for a bi-national (or indeed multi) approach with regards to Jewish texts and ideas. While what this means will be instantiated in the pages to come, it rests on several trends: the changing demographics of American Jews, the shifting and widening locales where their books are set, and

the increasing and increasingly controversial role of Israel in 21<sup>st</sup> century Jewish life. Here and throughout there is the assumption of a robust role for literary production in responding to and shaping cultural, political, and spiritual realities.

The analysis will be less focused on the theoretical concerns of philosophers and intellectual and cultural historians than with the ways authenticity works inside a set of Jewish American and Israeli texts, specifically in regards to Israel, which frames the meandering yet passionate presence of authenticity in Jewish life and letters. It is my further contention that Israel is a particularly revealing touchstone that sharpens and energizes the terrain of Jewish authenticity. These Jewish American authors imagine, construct, and deconstruct Israel in order to do the same to their understanding of themselves as Jewish Americans. These categories are not mutually exclusive, but rather relentlessly dance and shadow box with one another. This analysis will provide a more compelling map than has yet been furnished of the relation of American Jews to Israel, and it is my hope that this map reaches beyond the topography of politics, headlines, and Op-Eds and provides an account of how these two places provoke and collaborate into shape a portrait of contemporary Jewish life. Before we do that, however, we will turn to the most astute chronicler of authenticity in the contemporary world, Lionel Trilling.

### **Varieties of Authenticity: Trilling, Sacks, and Michaelson**

Lionel Trilling's 1972 *Sincerity and Authenticity*, derived from his 1970 Norton Lectures delivered at Harvard University, set the agenda for most contemporary theorists of authenticity. Trilling is important for a couple of reasons. On a general level, he provides a narrative for how to think about several key terms in our moral lexicon that is heavily reliant on canonical writers and social thinkers, and thus makes a claim for literature's centrality in formulating and iterating these frameworks. As Adam Kirsch trenchantly notes in *Why Trilling Matters*, the Columbia



Professor “tried to make sense of cultural changes in personal, literary terms- to make them an object for experience, rather than a subject for debate” (154). A glance at how Trilling defines the former can provide a tide marker for how the term comes alive in Jewish American literature in relation to Israel.

Trilling needs a long runway to get to authenticity, offering an extended account of the rise of the modern individual apart from role and station in life. In his resonant phrase, “it is when he becomes an individual that a man lives more and more in private rooms” (24). These private rooms become the scene for a drama between interiority and external presentation and expectations, as these two spheres disassociate and present the possibility of drift. It is in this capacity for discrepancy that Trilling locates the modern championing of both sincerity and authenticity. For Trilling, sincerity and authenticity both arise to fill lacunae that only arose relatively recently- they are both symptomatic of this development and its purported cure.

Trilling’s definition of authenticity comes after his initial discussion of sincerity, and it is oblique, surprising, and more difficult to describe and grasp than its sister term. Here is his initial stab at it, using Wordsworth’s poem *Michael* as a platform,

Our sense of Michael’s being, of-so-to-speak- his being in grief, comes to us as a surprise, as if it were exceptional in its actuality, and valuable. And we are impelled to use some word which denotes the nature of this being, and which actually accounts for the high value we put upon it. The word we employ for this purpose is authenticity (93)

The most vital takeaway from Trilling’s initial approach towards authenticity is just how deductive it is, and how clearly he is groping for a term to encase a suite of impressions that is indelible, vague, while remaining all-of-a-sudden. It is intensely, almost uncomfortably intimate, as it seems to adhere to some quality both deep inside Michael, but also public, performed, and visible. Crucially, there is something elusive about authenticity, a word that is ‘denoted’ and

‘employed’ but still leaves a fugitive sense of a quality not quite captured and an adjective that can never be objectively applied.

A more formal definition follows on the heels of this initial impressionistic foray, and fleshes out just how fraught Trilling understands the word to be,

It is a word of ominous import. As we use it in reference to human existence, its provenance is the museum, where persons expert on such matters test whether objects of art are what they appear to be or claim to be and therefore worth the price that is asked for them- or, if this has already been paid, worth the admiration they are being given. That the word has become part of the slang of the day points to the peculiar nature of our fallen condition, our anxiety over the credibility of existence and of individual existence (93)

If Trilling’s first presentation of authenticity suggested its obliqueness but also its strength as a quality of being personally exhibited but observed and admired by others, this formulation attempts a more elaborate taxonomy. His first critical move is to evoke the non-anthrocentric dimensions of authenticity, its use in discourse around objects and their history. Authenticity is “tested,” and the qualities of truth or falsehood, seeming and being are found to adhere to material things as well as animate ones. Also central is the question of worth and value, an economic interface that shades into an implication of currency that can be interposed to other discourses entirely: the more authentic, the more real, the more valuable. A chapter of this project will dive into the relation between objects and authenticity, and central to that consideration is the process of authenticating things. Trilling leans heavily on this dimension of test, and many of the avatars of authenticity we will encounter understand themselves as undergoing this sort of trial on whose other side lies the authentic self.

Here too, however, authenticity opens up a duality rather than concentrating down into a singular quality. Just a few pages after presenting authenticity as a quality that is bestowed by curators in hushed museum halls as a reward for impeccable provenance and legible history,

Trilling turns it inward again, from the museum card next to the painting to the object itself- “the work of art is itself authentic by reason of its entire self-definition: it is understood to exist entirely by the laws of its own being” (100). Here we return to Sacks’s distinction between existential authenticity, with its roots in the philosophy of Camus and Sartre and its championing of the benchmark of the personal, from external authority, Trilling’s identification of the museum as the final decider. These two strands continue braid through not only such spaces of discussion as the Norton Lectures, but also in more popular understandings of authenticity, a subject to which Trilling somewhat surprisingly turns.

This turn, quoted above, acknowledges authenticity to be a word that operates on multiple levels, and enjoys a vibrant currency in the realm of “slang,” a ubiquity he sees as attributable to pervasive anxiety about its absence; if he had it in spades, we wouldn’t be looking for it everywhere and finds it nowhere. Authenticity’s “slang” prevalence contrasts nicely and sharply with the curatorial museum “experts” mentioned earlier in the paragraph, although there is of course also a continuity between the two. At every level, then, authenticity, which seems to suggest a straightforward hold, curls off into differing shades of meaning and usage. As Charles Lindholm remarks, “Authenticity can describe tourists sites, the scent of floor polish, and the president of the United States.” This range is due in large part to its birth in modernity- from products to tourism to politics, we expect a level of ‘truth’ that seems to recede when it is most needed.

One element of Trilling’s discussion of authenticity that will prove vitally important in this project is his interest in the way the term engages national culture, which Trilling views as dictating the terms of what authenticity looks like in specific times and places. While he uses ‘sincerity’ in this instance, the point holds for authenticity as well: “The democratic state doesn’t

signify an absence of sincerity; it does however indicate that the personal self to which the American would wish to be true is not the solid, intractable self of the Englishman” (113).

Trilling is driving at something that is related but different than the point he made about the work of art in the museum. Even when we excavate our most authentic self, larger collectives will dictate the shape and grammar of that self. Differences in American and English culture will define how individuals within those cultures chase authenticity, and the language available to them to speak its name. Shading into this invocation that culture matters is the very different ideas of nationhood advanced by Israel and the United States. Both democracies, the former takes as its guiding motto ‘e pluribus unum,’ ‘out of many, one.’ The latter proposes that human thriving can be achieved through a shared culture that draws vitality from blood and soil.

Within these national languages of culture and belonging, there is a side of authenticity that kicks against these boundaries, as Charles Taylor points out in *The Ethics of Authenticity*—“authenticity is itself an idea of freedom; it involves my finding the design of my life myself, against the demands of external conformity” (68). While to first read this seems like a clarion call for a radical and Emersonian idea of the unconstrained and unrestrained self, “finding the design” takes us back to the tension between the self and the broadly communal dimension of authenticity. The ‘design’ is not a new one to be sketched but rather one already inscribed, and meant to be found. Blueprints for authenticity are often designed communally, which for Taylor does not quite mean ‘conformity,’ in his rather potent phrasing, it takes the form of a found design, or an etched and contoured freedom.

This last point will be especially important for the writers and characters that populate this project and seek to align or inveigh their own drive for authenticity with or against Jewish syntax, ideas, and assumptions. Trilling’s language here is very sensitive and knotty. The

American must negotiate staying “true” to a “personal self” while also realizing that what this self can be permutes across cultures and contexts. This is perhaps what Trilling intends at the beginning of *Sincerity and Authenticity*, when he observes, “our investigation of sincerity has no sooner begun than it has led to public and even to political considerations” (6). At first glance, this is not at all an obvious outcome for a set of values that perform on the stage of “private rooms,” but Trilling rightly traces the swift passage from the personal to the public. The investigation of what it mean to be authentically Jewish thus morphs into a consideration of what is Jewish authenticity. Lindholm is an effective guide here, “The story of Israel, which defines itself as “the only place in the world where an authentic Jewish culture can flourish” is a particularly complex example of how the quest for an essential authenticity has been intertwined with the rise of a nation-state, (112).” Intentionally or not, Lindholm references both a ‘story,’ ‘place,’ and ‘nation-state,’ hitting on three of the dimensions that make Israel such an important narrative, geographic, and political site of Jewish authenticity.

Before we move forward from Trilling, even this brief and topical encounter yields several conversation-setting interventions on the subject of authenticity. The understanding of the term that emerges from *Sincerity and Authenticity* is less a neat definition than a force field of anxieties, discourses, and impressions culled from ‘real life.’ This field-guide approach has the advantage of keeping the term both generally fluid and startlingly specific at moments. Still, certain takeaways can structure and provoke the forthcoming discussion of Jewish authenticity. They also set the terms of the debate for subsequent thinkers Lindholm and Taylor, who both see Trilling as the key thinker with which to reckon<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps of primary importance is Trilling’s contention that authenticity, along with its sister term sincerity, are profoundly modern

---

<sup>1</sup>In *Culture and Authenticity* and *Ethics of Authenticity*, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Gershom Gorenberg dramatically and comprehensively tells this story in his *Accidental*

*Empire*. Gorenberg emphasizes the crucial role that lack of governmental planning and policy

constructs that respond to the surpluses, deficits, and dislocations of contemporary life. The Israeli rediscovering who she is abroad and the American finding himself in Jerusalem are witnesses to the insight of Trilling's formulation.

### **Religious Authenticity**

Within these suggestive parameters, we can move from a consideration of authenticity in general to Jewish authenticity in particular. One way to do this is to translate the above theoretical discussion into particularly Jewish terms is to turn back to Sacks, who was mentioned above but who also goes farther in casting the subject in distinctly Jewish terms. Here is Sacks in *One People*, "From the perspective of the authentic self, then, halachic existence is inauthentic because it flees from making personal choice the center of the universe. From the perspective of tradition, much of contemporary ethics is inauthentic *because* it makes personal choice the measure of all things" (158). *Halakha* here refers to the entire structure of Jewish law, a corpus of obligation and mandated performance that Sacks pits against the choice-centric approach of modernity, where all orbits around the self that will constitute itself as it wishes. These are the oppositions on either side of the coin of authenticity, nicely drawn, but there is another dimension to Sack's invocation of the *halachic* that draws closer to our line of inquiry. He explains, "precisely because Judaism is the religion of a nation, one of its central terms is *halacha*" (214). This means that even within *halakha*, there is a bifocal vision between private code of conduct and covenantal and communal constitution.

Jewish law as directed to both individual and nation is an embryonic notion; in rabbinic tradition, the Ten Commandments and the Revelation at Sinai were pronounced to each individual Jew and to the entire collective. However, this Biblical feature that gets fully explored in subsequent rabbinic and medieval sources acquires a new dimension with the introduction of a

new kind of collective, the modern State of Israel. For some thinkers who sought to combine a religious orientation with a proactive response to the dramatic events that lead to the founding of the State, new and seamless possibilities for an authentically Jewish life opened up. As Sacks explains, “In the diaspora, as a result of emancipation, Judaism had been made private. It could no longer represent a total culture. The return of Jews to Israel, though, offered the hope of covenantal renewal” (177). The impasse between personal choice and community identification is both evaded and resolved by the invocation of a kind of collective that serves as the guarantor of our shared authenticity.

### **Moving Beyond Religious Authenticity**

From a different place on the ideological spectrum but concerned with similar terrain is the gay writer and activist Jay Michaelson, who in an article entitled “The Myth of Authenticity,” sought to redefine and appropriate ‘authenticity’ away from the realm of the religiously orthodox, narrowly defined. Michaelson disentangles authenticity from any specific vision of Judaism, not rejecting the term entirely but instead prioritizing an approach centered on personal authenticity. Arguing against the association of authenticity with “old-time religion of black hats and the Pale,” Michaelson endeavors to both revise extant attitudes towards authenticity and offer a new synthesis to resolve this tension between the communal and the individual. Writing against a widespread “anxiety of inauthenticity,” he proposes a “personalized notion of authenticity measured by integrity and individual coherence.” This is distinctly interior rather than external, and is non-normative in that it privileges no particular relation to Jewish tradition, but rather the refraction of that tradition through the self. We are most Jewish when we are most ourselves.

While both Sacks and Michaelson center their meditations on authenticity in relation to some form of Jewish praxis and intellectual history, other thinkers have picked up the possibilities Israel offers for reversing the ‘privatization’ of Judaism into a shared, fuller, and more authentic experience. More radically, however, is the suggestion that the presence of a Jewish collective in Israel can lend a “design,” in Taylor’s words, to the pursuit of Jewish authenticity in the United States. The range, passion, and consistent idiosyncrasy of the texts read and discussed here testify to a different reality; Israel has a powerful and oftentimes problematic role to play in the making of Jewish authenticity.

### **Structure**

This study is organized into two large halves. The first is comprised of books set in Israel, whole or in part. In these texts, Israel is the space where things happen, where characters are made, unmade, and revised. Israel, while a small country, is the opposite of an undifferentiated one. It spans high places and the lowest place in the world, and a remarkable array of cultural populations and micro-climates. This analysis reflects this range by spanning a variety of fictional settings within the larger zone of Israel. The archaeological dig, the settlement, and kibbutz are all places rich in cross-temporal reverberations that offer unique contributions to the larger imagining of Israel. However, they each come attached to a specific conversation about authenticity. Approaching literary representations of Israel piece-meal through these differing spaces is not motivated by a taxidermic drive but rather is meant to open up the multitude of dimensions that comprise the imagined Israel.

This first section, which includes readings of *The Source* by James Michener and *Safekeeping* by Jessamyn Hope, is in some ways the most eclectic, in that it considers a variety of spaces that are nested in Israel but that comprise something like independent city states, with



their own governing norms and internal histories. At the same time, they form an archipelago of spaces, ideas, and ideals that have been vital to Israel as a whole. The *kibbutz*, the archaeological dig, and the settlement thrive as fictional spaces because they are in a key sense already imagined, bearing a full load of resonances.

The rhetoric of authenticity and the permutations of space get dialed up a notch with the move towards fiction that focuses on Americans in the settlements in the West Bank. Centered on readings of *The Counterlife* by Philip Roth, *The Jewish War* by Tova Reich, “Sister Hills” by Nathan Englander, “The Ascent of Eli Israel” by Jonathan Papernick and *The Hilltop* by Assaf Gavron, this chapter crosses the Green Line and explores how authenticity plays out in American participation in the settlement enterprise. If the previous chapter tapped into the well of Jewish history and the way it magnifies and shrinks the individual as it lengthens and snaps back into painful proximity, then this one shifts the focus to the intersection of religious language and authenticity. The world of the settlers is a different Israel with another kind of territory and a loaded paradigm. These texts and characters intensify the rhetoric of *aliya* and authenticity by introducing a whole new language that delineates an entirely different kind of space. The settlements are the most polarizing subject both within Israel and in the broader debate about the State, and the presence of Americans in this volatile environment creates the kind of ‘third space’ mentioned earlier that is neither Israel nor America, but both and neither. This chapter argues for moving beyond the settlements as a purely political question and instead using them as a lens for understanding a specific language of contemporary Jewish authenticity, one that broaches the even larger subject of the dynamic between fundamentalism and authenticity.

The second large group, also organized into a tripartite structure, comprises books whose primary concern is going to or leaving Israel. *Aliyah* (‘going up’ to Israel), *Yeridah* (‘descending’

from Israel), and the *Tiyul* (extended trip) all clarify and ambiguate the relation between Israel as a space and the contestations of Jewish authenticity.

.....  
 Americans ‘ascending’ to Israel and Israelis ‘descending’ occupies the first part of the second section. The first grouping is comprised of non-fictional accounts of American Jews who moved to Israel in search of a more authentic life. All composed for an American audience, these books offer the most straightforward set of arguments as to the negotiation of American, Israeli, and Jewish identity in the lives of these contemporary writers. Nearly all of them tackle familiar turf, including American Jewish life, Zionist ideology, the challenges of emigration, and the scope of Jewish life in the United States and in Israel. Nevertheless, this is a differentiated chorus. Hillel Halkin’s *Letters to an American Jewish Friend* (1977), Daniel Gordis’s *Home to Stay* (2010) and Michael Oren’s *Ally* (2015) all track the journey and destination in different ways. What they *do* have in common is a correlation between *aliya* and authenticity. For all of them, moving to Israel is a decisive move towards a more authentic life. However, America is both left behind and never very far away.

This chapter attacks the conundrum of Jewish authenticity not from the grander arcs of history or religious fundamentalism but from the more urgent and local question of where to live. To some extent this is a matter of lifestyle, of moving and relocations that involve joining and leaving family, friends, and language. While every itinerary is slightly different, a bi-directional trend forms the backbone of this chapter, with Americans moving to Israel, and Israelis leaving the *Eretz* for other places. This last perspective presents Israel as rife with crises of authenticity, and as a project that suffers from seams and fault-lines in its own structures of meaning. These sort of texts often see meaning as especially fugitive and idiosyncratic, to be found neither in the capacious framework of American life or the Jewish State but rather in a complicatedly

triangulated relationship to both, usually experienced on some kind of periphery, be it geographical, cultural, or linguistic. It isn't so much that these books and thinkers reject authenticity in a Jewish context altogether. Rather, they shift away from seeking personal authenticity within a larger cultural context or mythology and towards spaces that provide distance from those shared and formative zones

Eshkol Nevo's *Neuland*, and Ayelet Tsabari's *The Best Place on Earth* make up the second half of this chapter, and are both works by Israeli authors featuring Israeli protagonists who undertake exoduses from Israel; 'authentic Israel' has become more than they can bear. While they share a point of origin, their destinations are very different, and speak to the canvas on which the authentic self can be sketched. David Bezmozgis's *The Betrayers* likewise balances Israel with a different and alternative landscape. In these books, authenticity is found by separating from Israel and the Jewish collective. The characters in these texts reverse field and migrate or spend time away from Israel, in places as diverse as Canada, Argentina, and Crimea. These geographies frame and accentuate the individual, and make a strong argument for the kind of existential authenticity mentioned by Sacks above. There are other arguments and perspectives that these texts raise, as well. Importantly, these texts by and large do not set their sights on the United States as an authentic alternative to Israel. They open other vistas to give us a more varied Jewish landscape than we have yet fully considered.

Finally, a personal note. Growing up in a traditional home and attending more or less traditional Passover Seders, the phrase 'Next Year in Jerusalem' was anticipated more as an ending than as a harbinger for things to come. After a night of eating, drinking, and praying, the phrase signaled that it was time for bed, not in the ancient Holy City but in my suburban New York home. But why did we never go to Jerusalem? I knew that we could, if we wanted to; I had

spent two summers, multiple winter breaks, and a gap year there in Jerusalem and its environs. I'd celebrated bar mitzvahs of friends and family by the Western Wall, in the shadow of where the Temple once stood. But somehow, come March and matzo time, we sat in Great Neck, promising to be in Jerusalem next year. Or maybe the year after that.

That feeling was the impetus for this project, and pursuing it has led to the knowledge that there is not a heavenly and a earthly Jerusalem, as has traditionally been maintained. Rather, there are many sideways Jerusalems, seen from differing angles and competing perspectives, a mosaic whose parts cohere into a whole only occasionally, and never forever.

## II. Israel(s)

This chapter features a number of nested spaces, all of them inside or adjacent to Israel yet each possessing distinct microclimates that both link up to the broader parameters of Israel yet also require their own exploration. Together, they demonstrate that despite being a small country Israel is not one kind of space but many different zones, a stage for an archaeological dig, military outpost, and kibbutz. All of these spaces are both self-enclosed as well as open to the full gamut of other territories and porous to a range of residents and interlopers. Both fortresses and peepholes, they are each of them new kinds of Jewish space, a departure from the ghetto, the city, and the *mellah*. They are sites that make arguments for what the larger space of Israel can and should be.

### ***The Source: Digging Up the Old-New***

I'd like to start in a somewhat surprising place, with a long-lived Quaker from Bucks County, Pennsylvania. James Michener wrote more than forty books, achieving enormous commercial success and winning a Pulitzer Prize for *Tales of the South Pacific* (1947). The geographies of his fictional and non-fictional output range widely, from Texas to the Caribbean and Hawaii to an investigation of the Kent State shootings. Eighteen years after *South Pacific* and nearly the same after the founding of the State of Israel, Michener composed *The Source*, a historical novel set in Israel in the mid 1960's that tells the story of a specific place in Israel through a layered excavation of its history from prehistoric times to the present. Each chapter is devoted to a particular band of recreated history.

This is a technique he would utilize often, and had already trotted out in *Hawaii*, released six years before *The Source*. These *bildungsromanen* of sites would become among Michener's best selling works, and constitute an innovative way to write the biography of a place and its

people. Behind the adoption of this storytelling strategy is a certain approach to authenticity, described by Theo Van Leeuwen in his article “What is Authenticity?” where he explains “something can be called ‘authentic’ because it is thought to be true to the essence of something, to a revealed truth, a deeply felt sentiment” (393). *The Source* alludes to this search for essence, and the archaeological push is to reveal the sediment of the past.

In his *Introduction*, Michener tells the story of his own introduction to Israel in general, and to its arid southern desert, the Negev, in particular. He describes this region as “an authentic, perpetually valid part of Israel...I could imagine myself in ancient days on a camel caravan in the Negev. The land speaks of Israel’s heritage, of Biblical times.” This gauzy romanticism and invocation of Israel’s ancient past is anchored by its intrinsic authenticity, and lies precisely in its immunity to change. For Michener, Israeli authenticity is not the Hebrew city of Tel Aviv or the captured and re-conquered Jerusalem, but the Negev, always there and always itself.

While it might be interesting to those interested in Israel that Michener chose it to be one of his locales, the choice becomes noteworthy with a collection he edited eight years later, entitled *First Fruits: A Harvest of Twenty Five Years of Israeli Writing*. In the introduction to this volume, which sought to introduce an American audience to the emergent Israeli literary scene. Reading this introduction together with *the Source* can reveal what Israel did for Michener, and what Michener’s fiction could in turn do for Israel. Michener is an energizing place to begin this study because his work opens up to its central questions; how do American writers tell Israel’s story? What is the appropriate range of literary genres and strategies to interpret a place both very ancient and startlingly contemporary? Finally and most expansively, how does Israel’s freighted past and complicated present have to offer to Americans, and how does it both challenge and expand their range of sense of living authentically?

It is both an oddity and unsurprising that the decade between 1958 and 1968 saw the publication of not one but two massive bestsellers about Israel. *The Source* appeared ten years after Leon Uris's *Exodus*, and both serve as important landmarks for the presence of Israel in American literature. The two works share several important similarities. Both are long but also page-turners, with vividly drawn characters and up-tempo plots meant to sell books briskly. They both present versions of an idealized Israel that owes much to the period in which they were written, the interlude between the War of Independence and the Six Day War when interest in, and sympathy for, Israel was at record highs. While subsequent texts will seek to sharpen rather than collapse complexity, *Exodus* and *The Source* do important work in introducing American audiences to a still new country. Michener's book especially, written just after the 1967 War and reflecting both that event and its broader Israeli and American context while also working backwards into the deep past provides both a terraced and X-ray glimpse into Israel as place and idea.

In James Michener's *The Source*, Michener's personal experience in Israel as well as his understanding and presentation of Israel as setting and vivid historical tapestry all point towards an attraction to Israel as alternative. For Michener, Israel's ancient past and sun drenched present are both linearly separated by thousands of years and a-temporally super imposed. The book's overarching conceit, that of an archaeological dig whose various strata are brought to life throughout the books chapters, from most ancient to present day, suggest a hermeneutic for approaching Israel as fictional subject, one that both clarifies but must also be approached with caution.

Central to this model is the link between evidence, continuity, and authenticity. *The Source* is built around the conceit of an architectural dig that takes place in the late 1960's

present. The site is a *tell*, a sort of raised mound whose various strata indicate periods of human settlement and activity. Thus, Michener uses a dual narrative structure to provide a picture of contemporary Israel while also offering a robust imagined account of a wide swath of time. These two frames are linked and implicated in all kinds of complicated ways. The present is charged with unearthing the past, but it is the very length of the past that adds richness and texture to the present. Michener introduces us to Makor, the site of the dig, as if it were one of the archaeologists who make their entrance in the first pages of the novel. “Its full name,” he tells us, was Tell Makor, which signified that the local citizens knew it was not a natural mound, laid down by tectonic forces, but the patiently accumulated residue of one abandoned settlement after another, each resting on the ruins of its predecessor, reaching endlessly back into history” (6).

The methods and craft of archaeological practice likewise contribute to the production and maintenance of authenticity. “The rock bearing the inscription they did not touch,” Michener explains,

for it would first have to be photographed in situ and then sketched by the camp draftsman in the precise position in which it was found, because from such photographs and drawings some imaginative theorist who had never seen Makor might construct an explanation which would illuminate a whole period of history 23-24

Even as Michener ‘gets his hands dirty’ in the soil of Makor, he gestures towards an authenticity that is delivered via analysis and tradecraft, in cool university offices rather than sweltering Middle Eastern digs. This glimpse into the process also nicely frames the micro-scoping and dilating relationship between archeology and authenticity. The chaotic and almost amateur haphazard nature of the dig itself, which at Makor is staffed by kibbutz locals and



Yemenite immigrants straight off the boat, at times seems less like a scientific enterprise and more like an economic stimulus plan.

The dig is concluded after a mere sixty-five pages, compacted into a dense burst of activity. The implication is that the real work will go on for much longer, and on two fronts. The scientific study will take place elsewhere, and carbon dating and pottery scrutiny will tell one kind of story. The second story to which the dig is the prelude is the entire narrative unspooling of the book, whereby each find at Makor generates and grounds Michener's brand of historical fiction.

What Makor yields, then, is a spectrum of authenticities, all of which are striated with seams and flaws. The authenticity apparatus of the lab is far removed from the tactile truths of the dig, and the vivid fictional account of the lives and civilizations that led to the Tell hover in the liminal space of the literary. Michener is chiefly concerned with using the site of Israel, and the shards and coins embedded in its soil, to animate a specific kind of paradox, one that is both key to the project of Israel and particularly indicative of the mid 1960's moment when Michener was writing. Briefly stated, this is the relation between oldness and newness, the antiquity of the state and the recent vintage of Israel, Israelis, and Israeliness. The appeal of a young population in an old land is presented with compelling force and charm, but Michener stops short of bringing the two together in a unified field of authenticity. The Israelis are firmly framed by their more immediate contexts; liberated kibbutz youth, the young but battle scarred veterans, and the cloistered and observant ultra-orthodox Jews.

Ultimately, however, the most dramatic experience of authenticity is not between Israelis and the past submerged beneath their feet but rather is generated by a visiting American philanthropist, who is funding the dig. His trip to see his investment in the early pages of the

novel necessitates intense choreography on behalf of the archaeologists running the dig, and Michener extensive details how this authenticity is produced, displayed, and critiqued. Zodman's tour of Israel is also a tour de force of Israel seen from a certain set of American eyes. What those eyes search out and what makes them widen in delight or moisten with sentiment provides a reliable guide to the pressure points and sweet spots of Jewish American expectations of Israel in the early years of the State. It also illustrates both the hunger for authenticity on behalf of the American visitor/funder and the Israelis who must match not his funds, but his sense of what Israel should be.

The gap between Zodman's expectations and Israeli reality come to the fore most prominently in the American's expectations as to Israel's level of religiosity. In brief, he expects a lot because of his very bifurcated understanding of the relationship between secular American Jews and ostensibly pious Israelis. Grasped from this angle, Zodman is representative of a certain attitude, ascendant in the 1960's if not today, that sees a division of labor as organizing the Jewish world. Money flows in one direct, *mitzvot* in the other. Zodman's influence is first felt from a distance, where he sets the budget and thus the priorities for the dig (yes to Crusader forts and gold menorahs, no to obscure pottery shards). His visit, however, ratchets up the friction between expectation and reality. Here as elsewhere, the line of scrimmage is authenticity.

Zodman has no illusions as to the cultural and geographic forces that made him and continue to drive him. "In Germany I'd be dead. In America I own seven stores. If I didn't give to Israel I'd be a jerk" (37). Zodman's giving is particular rather than undifferentiated, and thus puts pressure on the Israeli authorities to demonstrate tangible results. As Michener explains,

Often before he had encountered this problem of the trees, for skilled Israeli collectors, crisscrossing America for the Jewish Agency, cajoled many wealthy American Jews into contributing dollars for reforesting the Holy Land. "Imagine!" the collectors wheedled.

Your trees. Growing on land where King David lived...a living tree growing in the soil of Israel was something which commanded his imagination. (41)

We have a whole system presented here. Israeli fundraisers tell a story of pioneering photosynthesis to those dwelling comfortably by the rivers of Babylon. Central to the pitch is the reference to King David, an invocation of historical authenticity primed to warm Biblical cockles. Zodman duly gave, and expects *his* trees to be notated as such. Of course they are not, and the archaeological crew must scramble to erect a hasty and makeshift sign.

While Zodman can be read as a naïve American, Michener complicates this portrayal in several ways. His understanding of the situation, “You live in Israel. You have certain obligations. I live in America. I have other obligations” (41) is cogently rendered. The Israeli response, “Days of charity are over, a new kind of Jew lives in Israel,” is true as far as it goes, a bravado that to this day coexists with an extraordinary degree of reliance on American governmental aid and private donations. The accommodation between Zodman and the coterie of Israelis and foreign experts who manage his time in Israel is warm, frequented by misunderstanding, but also brief. Zodman leaves just a couple of days, cutting his visit short. One gets the sense that is better for all involved if the visit is kept to a minimum of highly impactful and resonant encounters, rather than the prolonged exposure of an extended stay.

Eventually, a kind of accommodation is made between Zodman and his Israeli hosts that speaks to the parameters of a sustainable and productive bond between American Jews and Israel. Zodman finds the Old World religious experience he seeks in a small Hasidic *minyan* in Safed. The paradox here is that there is nothing particularly Israeli or Zionist about this sub-community. In fact, it is almost a caricature of the *shtetl* mentality so many of the Zionists pioneers were eager to overturn and repudiate. The Israelis who accompany Zodman have no

patience for the mumbled prayers, stuffy rooms, and insular piety. For them, the ‘real’ Israel is in the cultivated fields and the startling precise platoons of the still nascent but already thrice victorious IDF.

While Zodman funds the dig, its implications and importance goes beyond dollars and cents. It is worth thinking about the ongoing complexity of archaeology in the Israeli story. From the very beginning, it played an outsized role in the Israeli imagination for several associated reasons. The return to the Land went hand in hand with a reinvigorated interest in the Bible and its places and a concomitant fervor on behalf of both leadership and regular citizens to discover and experience these settings viscerally and individually. Prominent figures like Yigael Yadin and Moshe Dayan spent significant time moonlighting as archaeologists, often times rapaciously collecting artifacts in a more lawless time. The excavation of national sights like Masada and the Judean hills became the subject of intense national interest and integral parts of culture and self-understanding.

Of course, this passionate investigation with the past and work to heave it into the present generated a problematic host of consequences. It implied continuities with ancient Israel that could be strained or misleading, and as Ari Shavit notes in his chapter on Masada in *My Promised Land*, both lent a powerful sense of purpose and on occasion a bellicose militarism. As Faulkner famously noted, “the past isn’t even past,” and even while contemporary Israel has moved from digs to high-tech, excavations remain flashpoints of tensions and intense debate about the use and abuse of the past. For example, the legitimacy of digs in and on the Temple Mount and around the City of David site in East Jerusalem have explosively linked the quest for the past to arrangements in the present and the contested nature of the future.

*The Source* engages some of these dynamics, but as a work of fiction spotlights the interface between the claims of history and the rights of the imagination. It is an archaeological narrative that is also the biography of a place. The various episodes that comprise the book are arranged by strata, like the dig that drives the book's structure. The different archaeological planes of the book are signposted by sketches of found objects that appear in the text, ostensibly hand drawn with the estimated date of origin appended to the side. The presence of these drawings plays a role somewhat akin to the photographs in Sebald's work, both suggesting a kind of documentary authenticity while flagging the extent of the liberties taken with the documentary form. *The Source*, while a popular book, actually activates a host of powerfully put inquiries into the nature of authenticity across overlapping spheres, from narrative to archaeology to the presence of the past in the land of Israel.

Despite the book's eagerness to dive into the authentically old and deeply historical, Michener signals from the beginning that modern Israel is not just a historical diving board- it is an essential part of the story. To accentuate irony, the elements that appear to Michener's characters to be most authentically 'Israeli' are those that are newest and most radically different than historical precedent. The first part of the book is a novel in miniature- a compacted narrative arc that uses the figure of the dig to host a range of opinions and polemics on the then-young State of Israel. While historical fictional exegesis takes up the lion's share of the book, this first section brings together the modern state with the ancient past, and manages to say something about both.

Makor is thus a site that is simultaneously an archaeological dig and a reserve of stories, all of which possess an authenticity guaranteed by historical detritus and in a few rare cases, treasures. At the same time, however, the specter of the inauthentic is a persistent and defining

threat. The archaeologists are perpetually afraid that the media will misinterpret the findings in the service of sensationalist ends. An allied fear is that the demands of donors and financial backers will prioritize artifacts of lesser academic interest (castles and crosses) over objects that while less ‘sexy’ might prove to be more illuminating. The danger of an inauthentic object is tangent to the potential for incorrect hypotheses about what these objects *mean*, a possibility that gives *The Source* its texture and complexity. The stories that are generated by the objects over the course of the dig and which are reconstructed in minute historical detail are not known to the archaeologists working on site, but only disclosed to the reader.

The architectonics of the way Michener builds *The Source* thus testify to the colliding definitions of authenticity that cluster around historical artifacts. On the one hand, they are brought to light only under the aegis of an authenticating and authority-bestowing cohort of experts and archaeologists. Their expertise allows them to date artifacts, generate hypotheses regarding their origins, and piece together the larger story of Makor, all while administering the operational and logistical apparatus that allows for the dig to take place. However, the book really comes to life and gains its imaginative force only when the found objects are ‘liberated’ from this regime of authenticity and start to disclose the stories in an unmediated fashion to the reader in a kind of authentic performance of the circumstances of their creation and discarding.

These circumstances all conspire to offer a deep history of Israel, offered in chronological intervals that closely track to the excavation of the Tell, ‘telling’ a story that moves from the Bronze Age through the founding of the modern State of Israel and the War of Independence. The overall effect is powerful and does important work for the relationship of Israel and authenticity. While Jewish history is by and large scattered, peripatetic, and marked by geographic disjunction and dislocation, Michener’s whole story-telling machinery is built on

continuity of place in relation to disparity of time, a technique that both conveys the impression of a sturdy flow of events rooted in the same soil while also raising the question of the internal dynamics of their nested relationship to each other; each successive chronological stratum ‘loses’ a high percentage of the knowledge of the era that precedes it. To zoom up and out, Michener’s work in *The Source* is to supply narrative authenticity by superimposing it on top of historical authenticity, which of course complicates both. While *The Source* is just one dig site, it is hard to avoid jumping to the conclusion that the entirety of Israel is a ‘source,’ of both literary material and a certain kind of endlessly iterating authenticity.

Early on, in a para-textual note appended to the beginning of the novel, Michener signals his approach to the relation between narrative, the historical record, and the land of Israel. As Michener disclaims this disjunction is of prime import- “Akko, Zefat and Tiberias are existing places in the Galilee, but Makor, its site, its history and its excavation are wholly imaginary.” While this delineation of historical fidelity might appear to be straightforward, it actually highlights the powerful combination of literary craft and Israel as subject when catalyzed by close attention to the authentic. The irony in Michener’s disclaimer is of course that Makor is both imaginary and the site of historical memory and a kind of civilizational Ur-place, possessing shades of reality that stretch back very far indeed.

Michener’s imaginary tell is rendered very precisely, indeed. “In Israel, in Asia, in the world, there could be no other spot like this, and when the superimposed layers of earth had been penetrated, one by one, the world would be able to say with some exactitude what had happened at 17072584” (7). The *precise imaginary* is one of Michener’s primary tactics in *The Source*. His chapters are studded with hand drawn diagrams of items found in the Tell, and logs of the dig’s schedule and documents relating to its activities. This sort of detail works on multiple levels,

doing the basic fictional work of world building while also doing the double duty of evoking the material conditions of contemporary Israel and the raw materials of the imagined but reconstructed past.

### ***Safekeeping: The Afterlife of the Kibbutz***

Like *The Source*, Jessamyn Hope's *Safekeeping*, a debut novel out just last year, situates itself in Israel's geographic and ideological heartland: a kibbutz in the middle of the country. It too is implicated in the investigation of history, and pushes together the present and the past. The central driver of the plot is a brooch that Adam, the central protagonist feels compelled to deliver to Ziva, a woman and old time kibbutznik, with whom his grandfather was deeply in love before the war. Adam is a recovering and not-so-recovering alcoholic, and his search for Ziva leads him to a kibbutz in its last moments of collectivist existence, populated by drifters and a motley crew of international volunteers. The book's central ideological chord is the effort's by Ziva's son to save the *kibbutz* by privatizing it, a conundrum that cuts to the quick of the *kibbutz's* status as a space with a vision.

The kibbutz was truly something new under the sun, a socialist community dreamed of in Eastern Europe that took root in the Middle East, and served as early laboratories for communal living and sturdy building blocks for a new state. As Daniel Gavron puts it in *The Kibbutz: Awakening from Utopia*, the *kibbutz* was "instrumental in establishing the State of Israel, defending its borders, creating its agriculture and industry, and setting its social norms," all while becoming "the only commune in history to have played a central role in a nation's life" (3). While eventually kibbutzim would take root all over the country and include a range of ideological shadings, at their beginning and most potent phase they catalyzed and furthered the radical newness and break with the past that characterized the influential pioneers who came to



Palestine in the early twentieth century. As Hope describes, “He understood how much she no longer wanted to be Dagmar Stahlman...daughter of a weak, humiliated people, but Ziva Peled, descendant of Judah the Maccabee, intrepid pioneer” (117).

In contrast, many of the characters in the *kibbutz*’s present purposefully tune out appeals to a broader ideology or calling. Ziva’s son is invested in privatizing the *kibbutz*, Adam ultimately forsakes his quest when he falls under the thrall of his alcohol addiction, and Ulya, who ultimately ends up with the brooch, thinks only of her own advancement and the riches that await in New York. Her attitude is instructive of the ways in which the *kibbutz* is both attenuated and attuned to changes in Jewish history

Are you crazy? None of the Russians are volunteers. We’re *olim chadashim*. New immigrants. The government puts us in places where we can live for cheap, learn Hebrew...I don’t even want to be in this country, but I’m here because this was the only way to get out of the Soviet Union, to be a Jew moving to Israel...but I stay here in this shit country, because it is easier to go from here to the U.S.A. To the real Manhattan (29).

The ironies here abound, and are not incidental but integral to the troubled hinge between the *kibbutz*’s past and its future. The original imaginers and builders of the *kibbutzim* were from the world that would become the Soviet Union, and the difference between that migration and the one that ensued after the fall of the USSR is both implicit and striking. Once again, the exodus from Eastern Europe is triangulated with possible landing spots in the New World and the Promised Land. Ulya discards the Jewish project for the global economy, opting into a different stream whose currents are economic rather than redemptive.

While ostensibly about the past and future of the brooch, *Safekeeping* is in fact a opens a new avenue at the intersection of Israel and authenticity. It does this by making the discourse of authenticity a two way street, putting pressure on both an American Jew forced to spend time in Israel and the continuing validity of the *kibbutz*’s relation to its own past. This tailors the

interrogation of authenticity we have observed thus far is several subtle ways, all of which push the discussion towards concerns that are exquisitely contemporary by instigating crises of authenticity for both its American protagonist and its iconic Israeli setting. *Safekeeping* is about what happens when a space is disaggregated from its ideological authenticity. The *kibbutz* here is a ruin, in a free fall of purpose. The larger story is more complicated, as in important ways the decline of the *kibbutz* presaged the rise of Israel's high-tech economy. The hollowing out of the kibbutz as a place of collective manufacturing is set in implicit contrast to the meteoric rise of Israel's information and technological robustness, found not in fields and factories but in glass high rises on the outskirts of Tel Aviv.

Hope's Israel is striated with various bands of seekers and refugees from authenticity, figured variously as personal, historical, and ideological. Israel is not the terminus to these journeys, but it is one place there they can disembark and take stock. The *kibbutz* is creaky as it enters its second century, but at a time was conceived of as a project of radical newness. The setting of the kibbutz, an intensely ideological setting that sought to be authentic to two distinct programs, heightens this complexity. The first was to act as a solution to a specifically Jewish set of problems revolving around labor, community, and relation to the Land of Israel. At the same time, the *kibbutz* rejected much of Jewish religious particularity in favor of a universal language of labor and sought to unplug its communities from the outlets of the Jewish past. Thus, the presence of the non-Jew in the space of the *kibbutz* encounters a complicated set of paradoxes that fan out from its dedication to its own kind of authenticity. The *kibbutz* is both non-denominational and intensely insular, open to anyone who can work and fiercely protective of its core values.

While *Safekeeping* can be read as a slow-motion account of the collapse of the *kibbutz* as a sight of ideological authenticity, the book simultaneously functions as an adjusted quest narrative, buoyed by a picaresque journey to return a family heirloom, an authentically ancient object. Adam is a troubled protagonist, wracked by addiction. His grandfather's past and his own present meet at the *kibbutz*, which overwhelms him and leaves him profoundly dissatisfied. He is an American Jew uncertain about his future and unconvinced about his Judaism. His passivity is accentuated against the backdrop of the vitality of the brooch that enfolds his mission and heightens the tenuousness of his ties to the Jewish past. Adam's attempt to square the historical circle and return the brooch ultimately fails. This failure is both a function of Adam's shortcomings as a messenger as well as an argument for the difficulty of tying together 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish history. The Holocaust, Israel, and America do not cohere. The question is why, and the answer has to do with the fading or absent lineaments of authenticity. *Safekeeping* etches a world where the *kibbutz's* failure to hold authentically with its own socialist past bespeaks a broader and deeper sense of things falling apart.

For Hope, Israel can convene people because of its links to a wide web of trajectories and itineraries, but its power to convene does not translate into the capacity to erect authentic bulwarks; people come, but they also go. Liel Leibovitz has described the *kibbutz* as a "uniquely impossible combination of Marxist ideology and Zionist convictions," and here the impossibility manifests not as miraculous synthesis but faltering ecosystem.

It is the dimensions and demands of a specific kind of collective that animate Jessamyn Hope's *Safekeeping*, a text at once very rooted in the Israeli context and interested in a broad range of nationalities, narratives, and trajectories. Set largely in a *kibbutz*, the most Israeli of contexts, it brings together a diverse set of characters who each in turn interface with the

lifestyle, ethos, and environment of the kibbutz. *Safekeeping* portrays a distinctly modern and realist account of what Ingathering of the Exiles might look like in contemporary Israel, or at least the Israel of the 1990's and the Oslo Peace Process. An American, a non-Jewish Russian, and a rigidly observant Catholic, all seekers and refugees of a sort, gather to spend a summer washing dishes and making yogurt. Unlike traditional Zionist narratives, they come not to build the land, but for a panoply of motives that are all of them temporary; none of them intend to stay very long, and none of them are ardent Zionists or committed Jews. Juxtaposed against the communal priorities of the kibbutz, their motives are relentlessly local and idiosyncratic; familiar debts, individual enrichment, effective management of mental illness.

Set against these narrative strands is a wider framed account of the growth, maturation, and demise of *Kibbutz Sadot Hadar*. This story, of the kibbutz's founding after the Holocaust, its longtime and stalwart commitment to rigid socialism, and finally its forced privatization widens out into a tale of Israel's first half decade as a state. A significant part of this story, and an even wider frame onto the Jewish story midcentury onward, is dramatization of the split between those who went to the United States and those who devoted their efforts to building the nascent state. These two paths are shown to diverge dramatically. What *Safekeeping* does do is tell an expatriate and Jewish story, and provide a fictional account for the kibbutz volunteering experience. In so doing it provides a distinct angle onto the attenuation of ideology; its last vestiges on the one hand, and its total absence on the other. Hope's Israel has to work out its own painful transitions even as it serves as an interlude for others to find their place. Two out of the three volunteers who serve as the protagonists of the book are not Jewish, and Adam understands his connection as more familial than national. The result is a paucity of ideological over-determination among the young volunteers, and an ossified attachment to the kibbutz's founding

principles on the part of Ziva, who resists all efforts at modernization. Set off from the rest of Israel, the *kibbutz* is a bubble set to burst.

*Safekeeping*'s significance in this argument lies in its effort to both give berth to Israel's pioneering generations and the structures they built while also pivoting to a more global, less rooted contemporary for whom Israel is just one place among many. Crucially, these two trajectories interact but do not really intersect, and that is part of the thrust of the novel's depiction. Generations and distant origins share space between the book's covers, but the overwhelming sense is of a real incommunicability, between generations, nationalities, and languages. The kibbutz is ultimately a contemporary Babel where efforts towards collective identity and effort seem more and more out of reach. Even while it spotlights Israel's ability to serve as a stage for a unique constellation of personalities and stories, the glue doesn't quite stick, and the adhesive is rickety and the reality less than ideal.

One of the book's pivotal dichotomies is its dramatization of the choice many American Jews faced in the 1940's, and that would come to draw the lines for the current formation of the Jewish world. Franz, Adam's grandfather whose brief affair with Ziva after the Second World War sets the plot in motion, initially comes to the kibbutz as a Displaced Person, only to opt to go to the United States the very day Israel's independence was declared. Their separation links into a larger parting of the ways, and Adam's return to the *kibbutz* reactivates this history but cannot undo it- the differences have only widened over time. It is one of the vibrating tensions of *Safekeeping* that grand historical events interface with stories of the drifters and the damaged that preoccupy the plot of the book.

Is *Safekeeping* about center of periphery, exile or homecoming? It's hard to say. Mostly it seems interested in the ways these different clusters of concepts collide and meet each other, and

how each one is insufficient or incomplete. Probably the most surprising of the book's outcomes is the failure of Adam's quest; the brooch, whose origin story we are given as belonging to the medieval pogroms, cannot survive Adam's bumbling trusteeship and ever menacing alcoholism. Similarly, Ziva's staunch socialism and fanatical devotion to the lifestyle of the *kibbutz* runs ashore of her son Eyal's cautious pragmatism and the concrete priorities of the residents. Even as the book seems to scatter into smaller tributaries of narrative that bear little relation or loyalty to one another, the contrived plot device of the brooch seems to suggest a mechanism or at least a possibility for a unified field that could knit together the disparate strands of its many characters.

It is not only between characters that stories converge and diverge. The eventful 20<sup>th</sup> century painfully inscribes itself more locally as well. A mother of one of the book's central characters, the teen-aged soldier Ofir, is described thus; "first her parents starve in the Lodz Ghetto while she's hiding in a convent in England. Then her first husband's killed in the Yom Kippur War, while she's pregnant with the boy...and after all that, the boy, her only child, gets blown up on a bus" (188). This woman, who only makes a brief appearance in the novel, is given a brief background shared by many in Israel- antecedents in the Holocaust, experiences of loss in war and touched by the Intifada. Ofir, critically injured in the bus bombing, likewise experiences loss, as his shattered eardrum prevents him from pursuing his musical career. Earlier in the novel, Ofir had been featured in an extended set scene in the West Bank, where in an effort to curb a riot he ends up in an extended encounter with a Palestinian boy in the cramped marketplace of an Arab village. Although the character in the book most involved in Israel's geopolitical situation as both soldier and terrorist victim, he also seems the most disengaged; eager to finish his service, more focused on the glossy packets from Julliard and the Yale School of Music than the rote of his military service.

Ofir's story dramatizes and extends one of the book's central tensions, that between the forces that act within Israel and constitute its internal pressures and dramas and the pull of the world outside the kibbutz and outside the country. By setting the book exclusively in the *kibbutz* (aside from a quick trip to Tel Aviv), Hope highlights and intensifies the tightness of Israeli society, its claustrophobic intimacy. This ambiance in turn yields to a larger conceptual challenge with which the book implicitly grapples. Its combination of distinct interest in a specifically Israeli trajectory and a roving representation of a wide range of stories and narratives puts it in an orthogonal relation to both center and periphery, and to the relation between Israel and Jewish American literature. The *kibbutz* is both the Israeli community *par excellence* and spatially and ideologically cut off from the rest of the country. Central to the stories Israel tells about itself and its own history, it is increasingly marginal to its current realities and future form. While its ideology and set of values both enabled its past and over-determines its future, it can also serve as a space where volunteers can linger with no commitments beyond washing the dishes or pasteurizing the yogurt. In *Safekeeping*, the work that is at the core of the *kibbutz*'s mission is actually experienced as pointless and without inherent meaning. In fact, much of the labor of Hope's writing and plot tries to get at the meaning of work that is both the price of admission to staying on the *kibbutz* and the collective's core yet attenuated value.

### ***Like Dreamers: Kibbutz to Settlement***

Yossi Klein Halevi's *Like Dreamers*, published in 2013, is a work of nonfiction that follows the stories of members of the Paratrooper Brigade that liberated the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967. Klein HaLevi persuasively shows how these biographies, when braided together, tell the panoramic story of modern Israel. *Like Dreamers* bridges the space between settlement and kibbutz, which also happens to be the movement through these chapters. The

structure of Klein Halevi's book suggests a certain understanding of the role of these two highly charged spaces in defining the character of modern Israel. He locates the central characters in the growth of the settlements and the end of the kibbutz movement in the battalion of paratroopers who liberated the Old City of Jerusalem during the Six Day War of 1967. The most resonant site in Judaism, its 'liberation' was seen as a turning point not only in Israeli history, but in the larger arc of the Jewish experience. The potency of allying this ancient center of Jewish worship with the contemporary exploits of the IDF were lost on no one, and were captured in picture, poem and song.

As Klein HaLevi tracks the trajectories of his protagonists from this powerful point of origin, a larger narrative begins to emerge, with the iconic space of the Western Wall situated between the vitality of the kibbutz in the first two decades of Israel's existence and the looming role of the settlements in deciding the question of how Israel would handle the territories recently come under its control, what Gershom Gorenberg has termed its 'accidental empire.' At stake is a rather large question, namely whether the settlement is heir to the kibbutz, or a fundamental alteration to its deepest convictions.

While in the popular imagination the kibbutz and settlement have come to be seen as diametrically opposed, they are linked by important affinities. Both are rooted in an admixture of utopianism and messianism, and both carry expansive ideological visions in the vehicle of tight-knit and insular communities. Importantly, both are seen as signal Israeli forms on the international stage. The settlement has come to define Israel on the world stage, although for some in a negative rather than a positive light. This happens in several ways. The settlement



issue becomes the dominant subject when Israel is discussed, and Israeli policy in the West Bank is viewed as representative of the country as a whole. Among those more critical of Israel, the illegality and injustice of the settlements is dilated to include the entirety of the country. This sort of move has gained recent prominence and salience in debates over the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction ('BDS') movement, with intense disagreement over whether advocates of the policy are targeting just the territories or indeed the entirety of Israel. Related skirmishes over such movements as 'Open Hillel,' which seeks to allow for a broader range of critical voices to be hosted on campus Hillels speak to this vital intertwining of making and taking up space, which is rarely 'safe' for all parties involved.

Despite their outsized role then and now in defining Israel on the world stage, the settlement and the kibbutz have never been large spaces in Israel, either demographically or geographically. But they take up a large amount of space conceptually and polemically, because they both are parts that say insistent things about the whole, and in so doing play an outsized role in perceptions of a tiny country that itself takes up a lot of real estate. It is not just that kibbutz and settlement found Israel to be an amenable space for their construction. It is that they both saw their projects as essential to the kind of space Israel would become. If the kibbutz built the State, the settlement would expand and redeem the Jewish polity by re-rooting it in Biblical soil. The opposing view also saw these smaller ideologically zones as disproportionately determinative to the larger dimensions of the Jewish State. As Gershom Gorenberg explains, "the process of settlement...led to the state's gradually unraveling, blurring its borders, undercutting its authority" (5). For thinkers like Gorenberg, kibbutzim built the state, and settlements undo it by confusing its contours. As Gorenberg explains at length in his *Accidental Empire*, the strain of authenticity that found a place in the territories is a particularly Israeli passion for pioneering and

settling. It is this affection among Israel's founding generation that Gorenberg sees as underlying the attitudes of the Labor elite who first had to decide the stewardship of what famed Israeli general Moshe Dayan called "part of the flesh and bone- indeed the very spirit- of the Land of Israel" (37).

The larger irony pokes through many of the fictional treatments of settlements in the next chapter, and is incisively observed by Gadi Taub in *The Settlers* (YUP, 2011) is that the infrastructures of authenticity for both kibbutz and settlement have collapsed, and yet the territory remains. The unmaking of the *kibbutz* dimmed one kind of utopianism, described by Matti Friedman as "the ideas having lived a remarkable life before dying a natural death, that beautiful experiment in radical egalitarianism played out, its presence at the heart of our society sorely missed and irreplaceable" (86). The withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 and the understanding that the West Bank would be substantially yielded in any final status peace agreement lessened the prospects for a Greater Israel. Still, it is the contention of this study that these remain potent spaces of pointed debates over authenticity and purpose, and that when animated in fiction comprise a new map of what and where matters most.

Klein Halevi does the important work of linking together the space of the kibbutz and the settlement, rooting them both in the Six Day War and its aftermaths, and thus to the core dilemmas of modern Israel. *Like Dreamers* goes a step farther, however, and rhymes with this project in linking the spaces of the kibbutz and the settlement to an ongoing conversation on authenticity; both spaces consider themselves repositories of something like the distilled truth of the Israeli project. As Klein Halevi explains,

Religious Zionism and the secular kibbutz movement agreed that the goal of Jewish statehood must be more than the mere creation of a safe refuge for the Jewish people. Both movements saw the Jewish return home as an event of such shattering force that something grand- world transformative- must result...it was the story about the fate of

Israel's utopian dreams, the vast hopes imposed on this besieged, embattled strip of land crowded with traumatized Jewish refugees (xxv)

For all of their differences, perhaps the most important shared conviction of the kibbutz and the settlement is the linkage between space and territory, which borrows and intensifies a core association undergirding Zionism more broadly. It is no coincidence that a national movement predicated on coming home would in turn give rise to even more concentrated views of what that home might look like. It is likewise no surprise that the contested heirs of a system of belief that linked Jewish renewal to inhabiting a specific territory would likewise link space and authenticity.

Differences illuminate similarities. For kibbutzniks then and now, the value of the land adheres to its potential to be worked. Its cultivation would double as the renovation of the Jewish spirit and the rebuilding of the Jewish body. While the age-old significance of the Land of Israel surely animated this approach, strident secularism and historical contingency pushed these efforts to the northern and coastal areas of the country, possessed of less Biblical significance; this was old Philistine land. The soil was made fertile, and the past less oppressive.

For the settlers, the relation between territory and ideological authenticity took a different form entirely. The aspiration is not to leap forward into a socialist utopian future but to reach back towards a religiously resonant past. For the kibbutznik, the new was authentic. For the settler, the authentic is grounded in the ancient. In a reversal, however, it is the kibbutz that is seen as emblematic of Israel's past, and the settlement whose presence or absence will increasingly determine Israel's character and its future.

While at first glance the *kibbutz* and the settlement seem to be diametrically opposed projects and spaces, they actually converge and form a continuum of imagined contexts that join

up to the interests of the Jewish American characters who wander in their borders and throw in their lots, more or less totally, with the sponsors and participants of these projects. More specifically, they form connections to the Jewish American experience. This dialogue between settlements and *kibbutzim* and the American characters that interface with them in these stories can offer new perspectives not only on these Israeli formations, but on key tropes that have consistently animated Jewish American fiction; immigration, multifaceted identity, and the relation of self-actualization to the broader Jewish collective.

It is worth noting that the connection between settlement and *kibbutz* is not just observed across these texts, as nexuses of American encounter. It is instead located in an organic or at least rhetorical tie that illustrates the fraught relation between the two most innovative Israeli contributions to communal living. This relationship is made antagonistic by the attempt by settlements to claim and carry forward the ethos and spirit of the *kibbutzim*. This narrative, employed by leaders of the settler movement to root their cause in a venerable Israeli paradigm, claims that the settlements pick up where the *kibbutzim* leave off. In this account the ideology and energy that sustained the *kibbutz* enterprise were just beginning to wane in the mid to late 1960's when the new territories made available after the Six Day War allowed for a similar canvas, but painted in different hues. Religious rather than secular, focused in the West Bank rather than the North or South of the country, Gush Emunim and their fellow travelers nevertheless suggested that they were heirs to the important things- love of the land, the allure of pioneering, and the excited willingness to build from scratch. Perhaps most importantly for the subject at hand, both are essentially evangelical in nature, sharpening the perennial Zionist quest for more Jews to move to Israel with the specifically compelling nature of their own efforts. Partially, this explains how American Jews arrive at these places in the first instance, and how

they integrate (or don't) once they get there. The American in a *kibbutz* or a settlement is both an interloper and a potential convert, alternatively proceeding with the zeal of the newly converted and the disenchanted critique of an outsider.

While at first glance the *kibbutz* and the settlement seem to be diametrically opposed projects and spaces, they actually converge and form a continuum of imagined contexts that join up to the interests of the Jewish American authors and characters who wander in their borders and throw in their lots, more or less totally, with the sponsors and participants of these projects. More specifically, they form connections to the Jewish American experience. This dialogue between settlements and *kibbutzim* and the American characters that interface with them in these stories can offer new perspectives not only on these Israeli formations, but on key tropes that have consistently animated Jewish American fiction; immigration, multifaceted identity, and the relation of self-actualization to the broader Jewish collective.

The next chapter will cross the Green Line and pull up to the hilltops and guarded gates of the settlements, among the most fiercely contested places in the world.

## The Settlements

The relation between the settlements, American Jews, and authenticity is in some sense the heart of this project, in much the same way that debates about the settlements can sometimes seem to be the center of both Israeli politics and how Israel is discussed and judged around the world. Each of these books sees the settlers as arguing for an anti-establishment brand of authenticity that throws challenges in every direction, directed with equal vehemence at Jewish American assumptions and Zionist pieties. The religiously infused language that animates these texts proposes a different kind of Jewish authenticity that drops ancient beats but in a distinctly contemporary accent. To be sure, while the settlements must be understood as a larger movement with shared tactics and aspirations, the 500,000 Jews who live over the Green Line are not monolithic, and as a suite these books tell a particularly American part of this story. This chapter traces literary representations of the American role in the West Bank settlement movement.

Specifically, it argues for the importance of the West Bank as a site where authenticity is a motivating and galvanizing force. More vividly than elsewhere, the settlements draw out how the Americans use the settlement project to access a desired kind of authenticity that is both recognizably American and significantly revisionist.

To be sure, the settlements are amply covered in newsrooms and political briefings, but the emphasis here on their literary representation is meant to both clarify their stakes and blunt some of the pitched rhetoric. Furthermore, each of these texts is meant to illuminate a specific argument towards authenticity. Like the red roofed homes that cluster on the hills outside Jerusalem, the worlds of these books share a terrain, a climate, and a sense of solidarity while also comprising communities less homogenous than that might first appear. *The settlements are zones of hyper-charged discourse of authenticity that is actually contradictory and multivalent.*

The characters that populate the settlements in fiction are those most insistently fluent in the language of authenticity. It is central to their self-definition. Even among those who argue forcefully for Israel's role as an enhancer of Jewish authenticity, these voices are a nested chorus that is sharper, bolder, and paradoxically both hyper-national and often anti-State. These voices are also amplified by virtue of their location at an especially fraught intersection. On the one hand, the role, validity, and idea of the settlements are conversations that happen, fractiously, within Israel. At the same time, the settlements are an international issue, but more germane to this argument, they are also tangent to American concerns in two distinct but overlapping ways. Firstly, they are of prime concern for American diplomatic and foreign policy, and thus a prime zone of friction and negotiation in any U.S. mediated peace negotiation. Secondly and more immediately relevant here, there is a disproportionately high percentage of settlers of American extraction, which ties their tranche of experience back to the American situation of authenticity and ensures that they often express themselves in language saturated in American idiom.

The result of this unique geographic and demographic compound is that the settlements are simultaneously an Israeli space, an American enclave, and something else altogether. While a solid body of scholarly work has thus far been devoted to the political gestation and ideological maturation of the settlement enterprise, we are just at the beginning of the scholarly effort to account for the American angle. This chapter argues for the importance of fiction in providing a textured perspective in Americans in the settlements- the moves they make, and the authenticity they seek.

The language of authenticity that turbocharges settler activity bears a particular relation to the State of Israel that is both fundamentalist and ambivalent. On the one hand, the knitted *kippas* indicative of the settler movement have become more prominent in the ranks of IDF units

and right-wing nationalist political parties. Settlers speak the language of Zionism unabashedly and constantly. They push for a robust, even militant Israeli posture that manifests in opposition to international organizations, laws, and regimes. Much of this hostility comes from the basic predicament of the settler enterprise. It is widely and internationally viewed as illegal, and so its viability is entirely dependent on the shield provided by the Israeli state, its policy and its army.

At the same time that settler authenticity is deeply invested in a strong vision of Israel, it also offers a powerfully undermining argument from within the nation-state. While the tension between settlers and the Israeli authorities is often described as an increasingly agitated and recent phenomenon, its ideological roots go deep, and many of these tubers terminate in the thought of Abraham Isaac Kook, a key early 20<sup>th</sup> century rabbinic thinker. Kook both valorized the State as a sacred and redemptive entity while also introducing the kind of messianic, eschatological sensibility that is the fuel for the theological reactor at the core of the settlement enterprise, always just on this side of combustion.

The settlers think of themselves at the vanguard, and their aggressive authenticity holds the State to a litmus test of territorial maximalism. While this set of convictions might appear to create a coterie more intimidating than inviting, it actually offers an aperture to American Jews, who can bypass Israeli cultural checkboxes and go straight to a chevra, or group, less beholden to Israeliness than to a Jewishness of land and soil.

The apparent single-mindedness of the settlement project actually rests on the scaffolding of an irresolvable series of paradoxes- a contemporary movement that purports to be ancient, a robust nationalisms that is built on loyalty to a territory outside of sovereign Israel. The settlements adopt the pioneering legacy of the early *kibbutzim* while reversing their politics and



attitude towards the State. The settlers see themselves as the vanguard of authenticity even as their presence is viewed as artificial and inauthentic, derided as squatters and even colonialists.

A focus on Americans in the settlements allows for another aspect of the story to emerge, one that places them in relation to their lives in America as well as the more immediate Israeli context. The decision to ‘settle’ is both a repudiation of that upbringing and an attempt to push it forwards and outwards. In Jonathan Papernik’s language, to turn the West Bank into the *Wild* West Bank, both exotically landscaped and somehow natively familiar.

While “the settlement project can be *partially* understood as an attempt to reproduce the ancient, former, or sacred map of Judea and Samaria,” it can be *fully* comprehended as movement whose large claims to authenticity only and always partially succeed on their own terms. In other words, “The settlers are therefore entangled within an ironic paradox of authenticity: the closer they get to the authentic, the more they participate in ruining it and substituting it with the contours of the modern Israel from which they retreated” (Feige, 82). While the reference here is to contouring landscape, these fictional texts bring to the fore a discourse whose attachment to the dust and stones of this patch of land coexists alongside residence in a setting imagined in terms Biblical, redemptive, and messianic.

Many species of cartographers have contentiously joined the task of mapping, naming, and imagining the West Bank settlements, among them politicians, polemicists, and armchair negotiators. I argue that for this perpetually reassigned, renegotiated, preserved and effaced, landscaped and bargained territory, fiction is uniquely capable of delivering a biography of this place and the Americans who have pitched their tents or parked their caravans in its precincts. These narratives can illuminate the stories and ideologies told and lived by the settlers themselves. By excavating this literary environment in the work of three major Jewish American

authors, this paper seeks to open a new subject in the study of expatriate American literature and a new perspective on the most controversial strip of land on earth.

Why these authors? The subject, while rich, is not instantiated in an unlimited set of texts. The three authors covered here are central contributors to the representation of the Jewish American expatriate experience in the settlements, but they each refract it in a different way. Furthermore, these authors all work more broadly across Jewish American literature, and they offer occasion to link up this topic to the wider field. Each of these works powerfully engages with the status of the settlements at moment of their composition, to varying degrees of explicitness. While this paper will not proceed in a purely historical trajectory, it will attend to the dynamic reality of the settlements as a hot button political issue that is both long standing and continually evolving. The ‘settlement’ is a kind of expatriate actor relative to the boundaries of ‘consensus’ Israel, affiliated with its home country by virtue of citizenship, infrastructure, services, and propinquity yet possessing a legal and temperamental sense of otherness and elsewhere-ness. As will be shown, the expatriate space of the settlement catalyzes and complicates the movements of those attracted to settle and stay in these places. The settlement is dynamic, and personified, not a mere background but also a partner and antagonist.

### **Historical Background**

Some brief historical background is in order, with the necessary caveat that nearly all of it is intensely disputed. A full account is beyond the scope of the present argument, but a short summary of the events of 1967 will set the scene for the literature under consideration. In response to the closing of the Straits of Tiran by Gamal Abdel Nasser and the massing of Egyptian troops along its border, the Israeli army launched a preemptive attack on the armies of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. The resulting victory dramatically expanded the borders

of Israel, increasing the size of the country by a third. To the north, the Golan Heights, to the south, the Sinai, and to the east, the West Bank. Additionally, Israel gained control over the Old City of Jerusalem, formerly under Jordanian control. Nearly all of these additions presented challenges to the Israeli state, but perhaps none more so than the West Bank and Jerusalem, which possess great religious and historical significance and are inhabited by the largest number of Palestinian Arabs. For the indecisive Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, it was too fraught a calculation. In the absence of a strong strategic vision, the settlement movement filled a void and created a problem<sup>2</sup>. The strained relationship between Israel and the people who lived in the territories was further aggravated by the Kahrtoom Resolution, adopted by the Arab League in September 1967, which stipulated that there would be ‘no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel,’ and “no negotiations with it.” This provided occasion for punting on final resolution of the territories’ status.

From the outset, the group of people who supported extending an Israeli presence into the West Bank was anything but monolithic, comprised of hardline religious nationalists but also children of communities eradicated in 1948 and everyday Israelis curious about what lay behind a border they hadn’t been able to cross. These complex and unexpected alliances extended to the intellectual realm, where such different thinkers as the religious-Zionist Rav Zvi Yehuda Cook and the rigidly secular nationalist poet Uri Tzvi Greenberg were swept up by the drama. Of course, there were dissenting positions within the Israeli camp from the very beginning, from the aging David Ben-Gurion to the up and coming writer Amos Oz, all of whom saw the movement

---

<sup>2</sup> Gershom Gorenberg dramatically and comprehensively tells this story in his *Accidental Empire*. Gorenberg emphasizes the crucial role that lack of governmental planning and policy played in the development of the settlement enterprise, on both the American and Israeli sides.

of Israelis into the West Bank as problematic in the long term. It is important to note that the settlement enterprise began under the left wing Labor Governments of Levi Eshkol, Yitzchak Rabin, and Golda Meir, although it was not until Menachem Begin's right wing government came to power in 1977 that rapid acceleration of the settlements truly began.

The works surveyed here span the consequential years from 1987 to 2014. Two intifadas, both centered in the West Bank, called tragic attention to the state of the territories, while multiple peace efforts, including Oslo, Camp David, and the Kerry peace initiative, have arisen alongside a growing West Bank settler population. On the diplomatic axis, the settlements have increasingly become a point of contention between Israeli governments and US administrations. On the literary one, they have been featured as setting and subject, as fiction follows flight patterns and immigration.

### ***The Counterlife: Choose Your Own Adventure***

This understanding of the shape and size of the settlement as imagined and constructed space enables an understanding of the expatriate experience they contain and engender. Perhaps the first significant representation of the phenomenon of American Jews in the settlements belongs to Philip Roth in his *The Counterlife*. This text considers Israel not only as a place where Jews live, but also as a set of propositions about Jewish thriving and authenticity. Roth begins a line of inquiry that encompasses the dilemmas of a global Jewish world rapidly changing, by the speeding rate of assimilation in the United States and the dramatic events of the late 1980's and early 1990's in Israel, including the First Intifada and the increasing prominence of Jewish extremism as a cultural phenomenon. Most importantly, however, Roth builds a bridge between

the traditional tropes that make up the substrate of the Jewish American story and the new setting of the settlements. In so doing he stages a conversation that seeks to sort out how the settlements talk back to the claims and ties of Jewish American civilization. Its arguments build a case for repatriation away from the settlements and back into a certain vision of the Jewish American past, but also treat seriously the ways settlers understood themselves and their project.

Crucially, Roth's section of *The Counterlife* in the fictional Israeli settlement of Agor marks one of the first times an American author worked to craft fiction from the Judean hills. In *The Counterlife*, the settlements become a setting where Roth can stage a debate about Zionism and the Jewish American experience by featuring two Americans in the desert arguing about where and how Jews should be.

Roth contextualizes the West Bank with discussions of the reach and legitimacy of Zionism's claims. In a ringing declaration diasporic identity, Nathan Zuckerman declares "My landscape wasn't the Negev wilderness, or the Galilean hills, or the coastal plane of ancient Philistia; it was industrial, immigrant America—Newark where I'd been raised, Chicago where I'd been educated, and New York where I was living in a basement apartment on a Lower East Side street among poor Ukrainians and Puerto Ricans" (53). He declares allegiance to the "jumpy beat of American English" rather than the "semantic range of classical Hebrew" (citation). Yet the story isn't quite so simple, as there are all sorts of loyalties and connections, lingering sympathies: Nathan recounts how gratifying his father found the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War to be, and fantasizes about the *nachus*, or pride, he would have gleaned from seeing Menachem Begin's election, an "Israeli Prime Minister who could pass, from his appearance, for the owner of a downtown clothing store" (57). These feelings of affinity from afar and discomfort up close comprise a relatively standard picture of American attitudes

towards Israel then and now. This perspective is complicated by Nathan's admission that Henry has moved to a settlement called Agor, "Nor far from Hebron, in the Judean hills" (74), which scrambles the relation between America and Israel. Forgetting the appeal of their "interesting and comfortable" lives, they "get a big thrill from the guns. They see Jews walking around with guns and they think they're in Paradise...they come on tour from America, and they see the guns and they see the beards, and they take leave of their senses" (75).

The first person Nathan meets in Agor is a woman with a thick New York accent. Her inflection immediately takes him back to that most American of experiences, awkward social events freshman year of college at the Hillel House: "that was the closest I ever came to Zionism" (96). In response to Zuckerman's question, "are you American," she responds in a huff "I'm Jewish," her outer borough origins climbing into her voice even as she tries to cut the hyphen between Jewish/American and sever herself from that identity. This oscillation between radical foreignness and an almost reassuring familiarity, with a hard-edged transit between them, remains one of the dominant windows through which Roth presents the sights and sounds of Agor. The settlement's Ulpan, or intensive Hebrew language course could as easily have been Middlebury or Yale, a college language center in July. Nathan picks up on the self-enclosed immersive experiences of university language acquisition programs as one possible way to think about a place like Agor. This thinking through analogy is an important paradigm for organizing the similarities and differences between Agor and America, which are both light years apart and distinct echoes of each other.

Roth's first four characters in Agor are all Americans from New York City. Once Nathan is introduced to the settlement, the conversation that ensues continues to be more about America than it is about Israel. A young woman, "the egregious failure of American Jews, of most Jews of

the world, to seize the opportunity to return to Zion is something that all of them are grappling with” (103). She also argues that it is the spiritual failure of American Jewry that gave birth to Agor: “this is why young people are learning Hebrew at Agor- to escape the Jewish oblivion, the extinction of Jews that is coming in America” (103). The United States, wracked by intermarriage and ravaged by assimilation, depends on the clarity and commitment of Agor.

\_\_\_\_\_ Agor’s ideological leader is Mordechai Lippman, a thinly veiled caricature of the extremist leader of Jewish Hebron, Moshe Levinger. Lippman, like Levinger, is American born but Biblically obsessed, and his fervor for settlement seems concocted less from a connection to land than a symptom of deep-seated Diasporic trauma. Nathan picks up on the incoherence of this blend of Brooklyn street fighter and latter-day Maccabee, typing Lippman as “some majestic Hugo Marx--Harpo as Hannibal” (115). The conflation of humor and conquest speaks to the strange fusions and apparent seams Nathan sees everywhere in Agor. In Ronit and Mordechai, Nathan sees American Jewry turned against itself, in paroxysms of self-loathing that undercut their declarations of moral and military confidence. Nathan encounters people whose ideological rigidity and rhetorical bombast draws them with the sharp, swift lines of cartoons, but who argue that they partake in the utmost level of reality, living lives that “do not have the luxury you American-Jewish writers have of indulging in fantasies of violence and fear” (127). In Lippmann’s account, the exigencies of life in Agor present a reckoning with the ‘real’ that has been leached away from an American sensibility where violence is a hypothetical and force a metaphor.

In order to make a counterargument for precisely that American sensibility, Nathan revivifies the spaces Henry left behind by inscribing them as interior and intimate to a particular biography, repatriating the connective chords of Jewish identity and belonging back to Newark.

In order to do this, he has to relocate Henry's formative experiences away from the "colony" and "civilization" Agor seeks to be. "Maybe the Jews began with Judea," Nathan fulminates, "but Henry doesn't and he never will. He begins with WJZ and WOR... at Ruppert Stadium watching the Newark Bears" (133). Henry's account of Nathan's origins is even more intensely locally imagined: "the kitchen table in Newark happens to be of your Jewish memories" (138). The alien convictions of the Lippman Shabbat table find their counterpoint in an older, more foundational table in Newark, around which different topics fuel the conversation: baseball, the Roosevelt Administration, a strapping and burgeoning America that appeals equally to Jew and Gentile. The juxtaposition of the settlement-colony of Agor and the beaten table in Newark suggests a reevaluated understanding of periphery and center, a claim to a local, particularized diasporic memory scape rather than a communal mythological one. The ground zero of *their* narrative is not Biblical place but immigrant space, the rickety flight of stairs in New Jersey that wind towards upward mobility rather than the stony terraces of the Patriarchs that merely tunnel back to the primitive passions.

***The Jewish War: "To the Land Which I Will Show You"*<sup>3</sup>**

There has been no more perspicacious chronicler of the passion and folly of the Jewish American role in the settlements than Tova Reich. If Roth uses Nathan and Henry to ventriloquize a debate about the legitimacy of the settlements in relation to the touchstones of mid century Jewish American identity, then Reich plunges readers directly into a community that has already made its choice. These are the most extreme and ideologically committed of the Jewish American expats, those most devoted to driving their own narratives. In two related books, *Master of the Return* and *The Jewish War*, Reich expands the arena of Jewish American

---

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 12:1



literature to its ideological and geographical limits. Reich weaves fiction from the historical record provided by accounts like Gershom Gorenberg's *Accidental Empire* and Yossi Klein Halevi's *Like Dreamers* while effecting a crucial difference by transforming her protagonists from native-born Israelis to American expatriates, constructing a landscape for Americans to both imagine and build. And yet Reich's focus on Jewish Americans in the territories is far from fanciful. After the Six Day War, American Jews played a key role in settling the land while also serving as the lingering demographic subjunctive, with the promise of mass *aliyah* to areas over the Green Line holding the potential to settle the question of their eventual identity; the Diaspora coming *en masse* to redeem the acres of the Biblical heartland. Reich differs from Roth and Englander by avoiding the earnest disputation employed by the former and the humble community building detailed in the latter. All of Reich's characters are immigrants, loudly demanding permanence while barely settling into tenuousness. The Jewish War tells the story of a cadre of American Jews who have been indoctrinated with a Zionist ideology that lacks a viable outlet, pioneers in a post-pioneering age. The book's action covers their attempt to establish a cult community in volatile Hebron, and secede into a fervent and militant messianic dispensation that eventually precipitates conflict with the Israeli authorities.

By limiting her cast of characters to those of American origin, Tova Reich both mediates and flattens the debate over the settlements. She accentuates the religious aspect to what was a complex project, and creates an ecosystem decoupled from its Israeli context, dramatically catalyzing the notion of the territories as an interstitial, undefined space, a corner of the Land of Israel under a different paradigm than the State of Israel that allows its American 'immigrants' to play out a fantasy of power and faith unencumbered by an encounter with the Israeli polity. As Ari Shavit powerfully asserts in his recent book *My Promised Land*, "Only in the disputed

territory outside of the borders of sovereign Israel was the national-religious tribe able to assert itself. Only in this undefined territory could it define itself” (224). The novel, however, starts far, far away from Hebron, in another kind of Promised Land, the Catskills. “She wanted to get away,” we are told about one of the characters, “Israel wasn’t really getting away; Israel was just another Jewish neighborhood, like Flatbush or Brighton Beach or Borough Park” (45). In this Jewish geography, six thousand miles isn’t really all that much, as the cultural continuity between Tel Aviv and Teaneck creates an international New York suburbia. The scholar Sarah Hirschhorn, in reference to the large American-Israeli settlement of Efrat, describes how “messianic biblical imperatives are balanced alongside uniquely and deeply Americanized notions of pioneering, adventure, and building suburbanized utopian communities in the occupied territories.” Reich is the preeminent fictional registrar of this uneasy balance.

*The Jewish War’s* first chapter, “Ascent,” begins in Hebron, the most charged of all places on the West Bank for its shared deep history as well as its more recent setting as a locus of Arab-Israeli violence. Hebron is exceptional for another reason; it is the town center rather than a wide tract of land that is contested, giving it a strained centripetal force. *The Jewish War* begins and ends in Hebron, traversing the spectrum from fundamentalist farce to tragedy. The novel quickly announces its set of concerns: “In a resonant voice, deepened and enriched at the cantorial training institute of Yeshiva University in the United States of America, Hoshea HaLevi declared the establishment of the Kingdom of Judea and Samaria” (5). The voice is the voice of the Diaspora, but the message is that of an extremist settler-separatist movement. The newly installed monarch of this Kingdom is Yehudi HaGoel, whose “first official act upon being anointed King of Judea and Samaria was to formally announce its secession from the State of Israel” (5). At this initial moment in the narrative, Reich signals a fragmented stratum of

identities. Both Hoshea and Yehudi are originally American, products of American Orthodoxy. By making *aliyah* they repatriate as Israelis, but then achieve a second movement to Hebron, which places them outside of the territorial scope of pre-1967 Israel, a position reinforced by their secession into another ‘state.’ The newness of this entity is consistently juxtaposed with the histories its citizens trail behind them. Hoshea’s wife, Emunah HaLevi, was formerly known as Faith Fleischmann, who

Had majored in anthropology at Brooklyn College and had even served as a Peace Corps volunteer. Her accent...rendered her exotic, no longer just another predictable girl from Brooklyn, and placed her in a community of romantic exiles, of interesting people...it was as if Emunah HaLevi possessed only accents, and no native language at all (7).

There is something excessively American, even Tri-State, about these characters, as if they have been kidnapped from a traditional Jewish American novel and dropped in the modern Middle East, creating havoc as they go. To a certain extent, that is why the setting of the book, which likewise goes by a variety of names depending on perspective (“Judea and Samaria, the so-called West Bank, the so-called Occupied or Administered Territories” [73]), is so congenial to its characters. The prospect of losing a “native language” altogether neatly encapsulates the vicissitudes of the extreme processes of self-change undertaken by these characters; they are no longer who they once were, but they are also indelibly all of their identities, all the time. Yehudi HaGoel, previously known as Jerry Goldberg, head counselor at Camp Ziona in the Catskills, inhabits a fantasy on both sides of the Atlantic; their bunk cleaning routine is preparation for “the radiant day when they would cast everything aside and make the ultimate ascent to the Zion of their dreams” (13). Reich’s satire is sharp, lancing both those with delusions of redemptive glamour and the institutions that inculcated those aspirations on the condition that they not be taken too literally.

The America Reich delineated in these opening chapters is one where everyone seems like they are just passing time at the El Al terminal- the country is an antechamber to the Holy Land, as American citizens perform the complicated pirouette of moving away from America but not becoming Israelis so much as of another cohort entirely. “Ascent, or *aliyah*, as they called it, was an imagined moment coming in the future so overwhelmingly thrilling and bright” (15). America serves as starting point rather than terminus, but the departures are more a matter of proclamation--these characters still bear the imprint of their American upbringing. Members are recruited for the commune/Kingdom that is eventually founded in Hebron based on two criteria: “love of Zion and a perfect score of 800 on the mathematics portion of the College Board’s Scholastic Aptitude Test” (94). In an even more dramatic description of a compound identity, Yehudi is described

Sitting at his chosen post in a twisted aluminum porch chair with a transistor radio and an Uzi submachine gun at his side and the two volumes he had taken along to pass the time, *The Book of Repentance* by HaRav Kook and the latest baseball almanac, from which, out of old habit, he memorized the statistics (88).

There is something grotesque about this amalgamation, but there is also a sense of pathos, or at least newness; who is this creation, entirely new and unfamiliar and yet taken from recognizable parts? Yehudi is somehow stuck in between the American context from which he came and the militant commander he has become, and yet the combination of the almanac and the religious tract doesn’t suggest synthesis so much as incoherence, assembled from totemic objects whose cumulative effect is incongruence. There is a touching temporal adjacency in Yehudi possessing the latest edition of the volume as a way of hearkening back to his earliest memories. And yet we are unsure of the relationship between the two volumes. Is Yehudi repenting for the almanac, or is the Uzi supposed to be the tool of someone else’s repentance? The liminal nature of the

territory allows for these potentially incongruous yet rich layering of selves, as reinvention is practically a prerequisite. Hebron, as a territory whose jurisdiction is older and stranger than either the United States or Israel, compels its inhabitants to rename themselves.

But by telling the story the way she does, as one of extremists doing extreme things, Reich misses the tidal wave of settlement in places less contested than Hebron, the rise of suburbs of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv over the Green Line, the way in which half of the residents of the settlement of Hasmonaim speak English, many working for large American companies. As Chaim Waxman notes, “rather than spearheading that movement (extremist settlers) and being among the most fanatically rigid forces within it, the large majority within this group appears to be among the most rational and moderating forces among the settlers” (219). In her predilection for the zany and the outlandish, she overlooks not only the mode, but also the median. Still, she does a valuable service in bringing into the fictional ken an expatriate population that previously had not been represented, and who are such passionate dissenters from the main spine and span of the Jewish American consensus. In the fundamentalism of Reich’s characters, performed with an American accent, the expatriate secedes and builds elsewhere, carving out a space neither American nor Israeli but rather coexisting in the Biblical past and messianic future.

### ***The Ascent of Eli Israel: Hollywood to the Judean Hills***

A Canadian journalist stationed in Israel after the assassination of Yitchak Rabin who now lives in Brooklyn, Jon Papernick’s collection of seven short stories entitled *The Ascent of Eli Israel* emerges from the atmospheric intensities of the years from the seismic murder of the prime minister through the agonies of the Second Intifada. Papernick, writing very much in the tradition of Tova Reich, is drawn to the twin concerns of Americans in Israel and those on the ideological extremity and periphery. This collection is best understood as a literary response to a

period of real crisis both within Israeli society and in its relation with the Palestinians. More precisely, the stories are set against the collapse of the Oslo Peace Process that can be bookended by both of these events.

Before jumping into the text itself, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider this moment as a literary background and context. The agreement seemed to augur a path forward out of the intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; more sanguine voices in Israel even expressed the hope that within a generation the compulsory draft would fade out as no longer a necessity. Signed in 1993 Negotiated by the United States, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority, the accords laid out a path to autonomy for the Palestinians and constituted the beginning of the Oslo Peace Process. The murder of Rabin soon after the signing ceremony in the Rose Garden and the final descent into the violence of the second intifada dealt severe blows to the hopes for an end to the conflict. As an editorial in the New York Times recently summarized, “the optimistic timetable broke down amid suicide bombings and other acts of terrorism, intifadas, and rocket barrages, unceasing expansion of settlements, military clashes, and ever more bitter personal recriminations.” The last efforts to restart bilateral negotiations mediated by the United States, the model set by Oslo, faltered in 2014 to widespread skepticism as to future prospects for a final status settlement.

Surveying the wreckage, Papernick writes from within precincts of Israeli society, but the prevalence of Americans lends the stories an international dimension, simultaneous claustrophobia and a sprawling sense of tension. For Papernick as well as for Tsabari and Antopol, the strangeness of Israel’s relation to questions of citizenship and belonging provide a fertile environment of ambiguity. An ethnic state that places exceptionally high demands on its citizens yet simultaneously offers shades and degree of relationship to Jews worldwide. *The*

*Ascent of Eli Israel* tracks these tensions in showing an Israel both familiar and strange. It also is written in a climate that assumes an American role in the country- as mediator or meddler, or something else entirely.

While each of the seven stories in Papernick's collection angle into divergent populations with an American accent, two stories in particular center on the American presence in Israel, and the presence of Israel in the American imagination. Both *An Unwelcome Guest* and *The Ascent of Eli Israel*, the title story, figure Americans as ideologically saturated, possessed of an intense nationalist fervor. At a moment of attempted American mediation and peace process midwifery, Papernick presents Americans as a combustible ingredient in the compound of Israeli society, dangerous if not unwelcome.

While *An Unwelcome Guest* gains traction by virtue of the details that place it historically and politically, it acquires force by the way Papernick delivers this reality by employing the supernatural to animate painful present realities and conflicting historical realities. The first signals that the story will engage controversy blink through subtly; the apartment located in the "Muslim Quarter," the free-indirect reference to "Ishmaelites." The protagonist, Yosi Bar-Yosef, wielding a name adopted rather than given, awakes on night to find an old man sitting in his kitchen. His physical description provides a clue as to his significance, and his individuality fades into a metaphorical rendering of landscape and origin,

The Arab may have been sixty-five or seventy years old. His face was cracked like a wadi in the heat of summer, his nose round, bulbous, and pocked like a Judean hilltop...he wore a black and white checked kaffiyeh. (28)

Here as throughout the story, much of the fraughtness of the circumstances is encoded in the language. The "cracked wadi" is set among the "Judean hilltop," mixing an Arabic word with

one of Hebrew origin to suggest the contested space of landscape. That conflict soon becomes the animating tension of the story as the ‘guest’ confronts Bar-Yosef with the claim that the former is the actual owner of the apartment. Yossi’s origin in New York is contrasted with the Ziad Abu Youssif’s memory of being born “in that room, where you slept” (29). Bar Yosef and Abu Youssif become interlocutors with different histories and perspectives, but also with a shared and troubled intimacy as they share a name (Yosef and Youssif are sonically and etymologically kin) a table, and eventually the game of *shesh besh*, or backgammon with high stakes, alternatively defined as the right to the house and “the right to speak” (31). In fact, the entire game is laced with conversation, and it unfolds along predictable lines. Yosi claims Biblical heritage and intrinsic Jewish connection to Jerusalem as his motivation and justification for living in the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem, and Ziad offers the traditional Palestinian Arab narrative of displacement and dispersion, at one point reciting the name of the Palestinian towns lost in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war as if they were a polemical litany. As the game becomes more contested and extended, more people populate the room, all relatives of Ziad who appear suddenly and hover beside the contestants. These observers become more belligerent, and in turn Yossi stakes his own claims to the traumas of history, invoking the 1929 Arab rioting in Hebron that killed sixty nine Jews, to which one of the women who have appeared in the apartment replies “Arrogant Jew. Liar. Zionist” (38). The rhetoric charges and sharpens the play of the dice as the randomness of the roll falls in with the rhythm of an increasingly shrill and antagonistic round of recriminations. Papernick heightens the intensity of his story to an almost unbearable pitch by superimposing space, deploying the ghostly to illustrate just how cramped differing narratives can render the concrete. Papernick’s story weaponizes the past against the present a way into thinking about how powerfully contested space can be. It stages this conflict not across



the broad expanse of a land generally conceived, but rather in the confines of a particular apartment, a fraught home particularly vulnerable to disputations of ownership.

It becomes clear that while the Ziad and Yossi are engaged in a play-battle for the particular apartment in which they are sitting, there are also larger definitions of history at stake in their polemics. For Ziad, history is personal, comprised of such memories as “I shared that room with my brother when I was a child” and “there was a pomegranate tree at the window. My son Youssif liked to climb in it” (35). The personal extends back in time and forward into the future by virtue of familial extensions, which convey not only past claims but also future promises of retribution; “fear our children. Fear my son Youssif. He will burn your crops, tear down your home, and eat the flesh of your children” (39). The increasingly crowded kitchen itself constitutes an argument for presence and insistence of claim. The family’s experience in turn gives rise to a larger sense of outrage- “he cried for Palestine and the, and the bloodstained hilltops, and the weeping sea shores” (40). Ziad’s claim of “just remembering” loses its qualification and is wielded as a narrative weapon and bludgeon.

For Yossi, who just recently moved to Israel, his stake in Israel is pitched differently, on a particular understanding of the relation between history and memory. As he explains,

Memory is in the blood. I was there as I was at Sinai to receive the commandments. I was exiled from Spain. I wandered. And I remember pogroms beyond the Pale and the killing...Jews have been in Hebron since the time of Abraham. You have only lived there since the thirteenth century. (39)

Papernick thus schematizes the conflict between the Jewish and Palestinian narratives as in turn founded on different notions of what constitutes presence and how the individual interlocks with larger historical frames. For Yossi, the durable gossamer threads of Jewish memory are

transnational and trans-historical, giving every Jew access to the entirety of Jewish history. The invocation in this passage of “blood” and the insistent repetition of “I” mobilize these imaginative resources to build a link of uninterrupted connection and presence. The pivotal word here is “remember,” which Papernick invests with a host of resonances. Firstly, there is the proximate volley back to Ziad’s invocation of “remembering,” a rhetorical counter that matches the back and forth of the game of *shesh besh*. Secondly, memory, *zachor* in Hebrew, is a recurring motif in the Hebrew Bible, most memorable in an instance from Deuteronomy 25:17, in the passage that came to define a traditional Jewish approach to processing history and persecution. I quote it in full because it stands behind Yossi’s retort.

Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way as ye came forth out of Egypt; how he smote the hindmost of thee, all that were enfeebled in thy rear, when thou was faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord thy God has given thee rest from all thine enemies roundabout, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget. (Deuteronomy 17-19)

Papernick’s American protagonist leans on this set of concepts rhetorically and conceptually, and it is not hard to see why. In the Jewish mind Amalek is both a specific historical foe and a mobile target used to refer to any enemy of the Jewish people. Furthermore, the memory of Amalek is specifically linked to the vulnerabilities of statelessness (“by the way as ye came forth out of Egypt”) and the advantages of sovereignty (“as inheritance to possess it”). Potently, it urges both effacing from memory and relentlessly remembering, a selectivity that makes the past usable and the future legible.

While this reading of the confrontation between Ziad and Yossi quickly escalates into the abstract, Yossi’s status as an American is a crucial heightener of the stakes and sharpens the

arguments involved. To be sure, to Ziad even a native born Israeli would be an interloper in a space he considers ancestrally his, Yossi's status as a recent *oleh* both makes his presence even more infuriating to Ziad while simultaneously allowing Papernick an opportunity to articulate a defense rooted in a particularly Jewish sensibility but removed from any Israeli political context; we leap straight into blood and history. Thus, when Yossi explicitly argues "You do not belong here. You are Amalek" (44) Ziad replies in a similar theological register, "Yes, I am Amalek...I am a son of Ishmael and you are a son of Isaac...the land of Palestine is an Islamic holy possession, given to future Muslims until Judgment Day." The violence that ends the story is predictable, and at one of the final instances Yossi's prayer consists of regret, of "wishing Moses had never led his people out of the wilderness, wishing that he had never come to this violent desert land, wishing that he and Devorah were safe in bed back in New York" (46). In a panic stricken moment, Yossi unwinds the historical trajectories he launched earlier, finding his way back to New York from contested Jerusalem.

A similar path is traced in the book's title story, but with different tonalities and tensions. Still, the two fit together both convergently and complementarily. They both feature New Yorkers in complicated places, disputed territories. Whereas Yossi lives and is haunted in the tense and tight alleyways of quartered and drawn Jerusalem, Eli Israel moves from dense and urban Brooklyn to the plains of the West Bank, "protecting the Green Line between Israel and the West Bank, with just his wooden staff, an old .38 Special, and his lumpy carpetbag." If "An Unwelcome Guest" gestured towards the urban crime novel, with its nourish setting and apartment break in and hold up, then "The Ascent of Eli Israel" dips its feet in the Western and the novels of solitude, retreat, and escape, the project of finding yourself while "melting into the land" (79). A kind of lightly drawn Emersonianism permeates Eli's perceptual apparatus; in the

Judean Hills, a newer New England, he discovers “that all the elements of the universe existed inside of everything” (80). In contrast to Yossi, Eli comes not so much for ideology or a sense of national purpose but at the behest of religious revelation. The word spoken in “his aging mother’s apartment in Brooklyn,” a kind of latter day Sinai, urges Eli Haller to change his name and place. Like immigrants before him, his journey is eased by someone already in the New Country, Zev, who lives in a caravan just outside of Hebron and welcomes him to the “wild, wild West Bank” (83). As in Tova Reich’s fictions, this set of Americans are given a backstory that seems both remote from their current lives and deeply informative of their circumstances. Eli and Zev first met, “years back at a John Lennon Memorial at Strawberry Fields in Central Park,” later convening to “prowl the streets of New York” and jointly failing out of AA. The vaguely cinematic descriptions of landscape and slightly stagy sound of the dialogue owe something to Eli’s former career as an ‘Elder Statesman of American Television,’ a tenure that involved a descent into drugs and infidelity, and in relation to which Eli’s current circumstances are both a refutation and response.

Eli and Zev’s born again fervor and enthusiasm add tone to their story, a link to genres of recovery and rehab. Of course, the area where this journey transpires is no treatment center or West coast resort but a no man’s land that also is a much-claimed land. In an interesting wrinkle, however, Eli’s journey first comes into conflict not with local Arabs, but with the Israeli soldiers assigned to patrol the area. Like in “An Unwanted Guest,” the American element in the story both highlights traditional points of conflict in the Israeli milieu and frames these flashpoints in an off kilter way. For the Israeli security forces, Americans like Eli are both incomprehensible and destabilizing. To the eighteen year old soldier serving his time, Eli’s bombastic declarations

that “I can go wherever I want, I’m a Jew in Jewish land” reads as crazy- why would anyone want to linger in that wasteland if they didn’t have to?

For Eli, the appeal of the environment is twofold, as he both accesses the wilderness as well as a crash course in religious belief and an unapologetic Zionism, the logic of conflict and extremism as articulated in its most intense laboratories. Throughout, Papernick highlights the extremism of these beliefs and their contiguity to Eli’s frames of reference. He thinks through the geography of settlements in relation to the boroughs of New York City, and his participation at a right wing rally against the Oslo peace process finds its nearest analogue in the Yankees 1977 World Series victory celebrations (95). A combination of the burning Bronx and the Wild West unfolds in Hebron as Zev spurs Eli to shoot at Palestinian roofs and water drums. Immediately, this precipitates an encounter not with Palestinians, but with Israeli forces in the area, who stage a confrontation that should now be familiar; “you come to Israel because you are a Jew and you act like a maniac. Tell me, why is it that all the scum of the world comes to Israel? You have a home in Brooklyn or Miami, no? You are a Zionist? Good. Go to Jeruzalem” (99). The punchy humor of this passage lies in its reversal of several venerable frameworks for the understanding the relationship between American Jews and Israel. For the soldier, Eli and Zev are prime examples of how the Ingathering of Exiles can yield not the best and the brightest but the deluded and demented. Israel’s tensions and drama attract thrill seekers who can’t get their fix in South Beach or the Metropolitan area.

If in *An Unwelcome Guest* centered on Yossi’s ideological yet essentially inadvertent placement at the center of a bloody and complex intersection of memory and history, then *The Ascent of Eli Israel* expands Reich’s cohort of American Jews who come not only to stir the pot, but to knock it off the stove entirely. While never a numerically large group, this population has been a vocal

and disruptive one.

### **“Sister Hills”: From Caravan to Community**

\_\_\_\_\_ It was a mantra of the Zionist pioneers in the early twentieth century that the agricultural work they set out to do in Palestine was of a reciprocal nature- they sought to “build and be built” by the land, a partnership that simultaneously figured the land as an entity to be mastered and as a personified presence, a trope that goes as far back as the Song of Songs. In contemporary discourse about the settlements, there are echoes of this sort of discourse, most notably in the discussion around “growth” in the settlements, “natural” and otherwise. A sense of an archetypical settlement’s trajectory will serve as a dynamic backdrop to the human role in the project. This section is distinct in another way as well. It is the only one that does not focus on American protagonists, although it is by an American author. In truth, even its Israeli characters take a back seat to the caravans, houses, and parks that form the anatomical constitution of this complicated place. How did Nathan Englander end up here?

Parts of Englander’s first short story collection, *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* (1999) brought a nuanced depiction of Orthodox Jewish practice back into the purview of mainstream fiction, and his *The Ministry of Special Cases*(2007) was set in Argentina, filtering the Jewish experience through the local traumas of Buenos Aires’ ‘Dirty War.’ This was an impressive achievement, as it imagined upheaval away from Europe, the United States, or Israel, broadening the geographic imagination of contemporary Jewish space. The second story in the Long Island-born Englander’s latest collection, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank*(2012), entitled “Sister Hills”, imagines a West Bank settlement during its formative years. If Reich and Roth delineate the Americans of the West Bank, Englander builds a biography of the settlement itself.

*Sister Hills*' first section is set in 1973, at the start of the Yom Kippur War. The story is initially told from "a hilltop not many miles east from Jerusalem," clearly situating it in the contested territories east of the Green Line. Despite the specified setting in space and time, Englander quickly introduces another rhythm-- "holding the position, with his beard blowing, and his long white robe, and the *tallit* on his shoulders, he looked poised among the ancient hills- like a man outside of time" (33). The image could be quite old, but it is actually a relatively new one, which would have become possible less than a decade before. The "one-room shack" where Hanan lives marks this as a new, possibly 'illegal' settlement. The impression is furthered by the elaboration "centered in the middle of an olive grove, the shack was without running water or electricity" (36). Contentious arguments over property and territory accompanied these early, wildcat settlements- its being off the grid implies that it has not yet gained approval, tacit or otherwise, from the Israeli authorities. But the ambition of the settlers, Hanan and Rena, Skate and Yehudit, is clear- "together they'd come up with the plan, and bought the land, and decided to settle the area of Samaria together, and build from their two families a great and mighty place" (37).

This plan quickly encounters opposition. Rena, rifle in one hand, Psalms in the other, begins chopping down a tree, and is approached by an Arab boy who tells her to stop. Even as the Yom Kippur War between Israel and the Arab armies transpires off-screen, a different yet related conflict between a settler and a Palestinian moves into the foreground. This confrontation is both hostile and textured. The boy's initial address is made in Arabic, but since "Rena either didn't speak Arabic or didn't care to respond," the conversation switches into Hebrew. The use of "either" suggests just how little the two sides understand each other, as uncertainty is edged with a kind of brusqueness. This problem of translation or understanding is aggravated by the

certainty Rena espouses, “it’s my tree, my land, in my country.” The Arab boy, who is not named, intuitively senses the seriousness of the conviction with which this claim is made, retorting “I looked up and I saw that you were doing something that can’t be undone” (38). He then curses Rena. This curse marks the beginning of an increasingly occult turn of events. Rena’s neighbor Yehudit’s baby becomes ill, and “in the way of the old country”- Europe, the shtetl- begs Rena to ‘buy’ the girl and thus save her by changing her fate. This course of action comes from a peculiar reading of history, writ small-

Why else, on Yom Kippur, would God call my husband away to war? To do that, and then reach into my home to take back the blessing He’d just sent me? And this after I’d left behind my whole family. This after I moved up to a forgotten hilltop, after I sacrificed happiness to make Israel whole. No, there has been a sin. (41)

Englander gestures towards the larger discourse in Israel about the war. The breakout of hostilities on Yom Kippur was perfect fodder for theological speculation. As Gorenberg illustrates, this reckoning of the war’s failures and the state’s lack of preparedness yielded profoundly different results among the secular Labor Zionist leadership, where it irrevocably fractured the leadership of Defense Minister Moshe Dayan and generated a redoubled commitment to settlement. The imperative ‘make the land whole’ becomes here one of the preeminent commandments, reflecting the absorption into traditional Jewish moral values of the settlement enterprise.

This first section of the story offers a kind of prehistory, a mythical and tangentially supernatural *Ur-story* of settlement creation. Hanan is killed in the fighting, and friends from their son’s *yeshiva* come to the hilltop to help make a *minyan*, a prayer quorum for the mourning period. This gesture is both sincere and a pretext, as they quickly promise “to make this our home too. And we will not so much step off this hill until there are ten for each one of us. Until



our seven are seventy” (45). The subtraction of Hanan’s presence spurs multiplicative expansion, as revenge and memorialization merge in a commitment to building. The work begins immediately--“ the seven who were not grieving went right to clearing rocks, pulling weeds, and planting their tents on the hill” (46). Both the discussion between Rena and the Arab boy and Yehudit’s sale of her baby to Rena are omens tracked throughout the story. Englander seeds the subsequent story of the settlement’s development with these two encounters, highlighting the tension between resolved and unresolved arrangements, and the pain inscribed in both. Importantly, however, these encounters could only have happened in a sparsely populated space, where two people could speak each to another or buy and sell children with only the hills to hear.

Those hills quickly fill up. The next section is set in 1987, the same moment as Reich’s fictions and Grossman’s investigations. As noted above, the jump from the early seventies into the late eighties bounds over a steady expansion in settlement investment. Englander captures the way in which founding narratives are both mobilized and forgotten: “it was this day that was talked about for years to come. How sister hills became a city...they were simply taken with the legend of the sacrifice and the *halutz*-like pioneering commitment of this woman... the aura of this tale was strengthened by the facts on the ground” (46). These facts include “paved roads, two schools, a synagogue,” and most spectacularly of all, “thanks to a Texas evangelist who had fallen in love with the place, (before a greater love undid him), their settlement had been gifted with a sports center, complete with the only ice skating rink in the West Bank as a whole” (46). The spare and strange beginning of the settlement is woven into its bourgeois expansion, its transformation into a city aided by its relation to American philanthropy of the Christian Zionist flavor. Englander taps into a broader feature of the settlement movement- its dual desires to harness the mythology of the *halutzim*, the original pioneers who cleared the swamps and set up

the first *kibbutzim*, and to provide suburban-like amenities to attract a critical mass of residents, ensuring the permanence of the settlements by merging them with the mainstream.

\_\_\_\_\_ The final, longest section of the story is set in 2000, and depicts the settlement at a yet another stage of development--“another thirteen years pass, and those sister hills now cap a metropolis” (49). The settlement emerges as a full-fledged character whose *bildung* is detailed specifically and admiringly: “There was a mall with a food court, and a multiplex within it that showed all the American films. There was a boutique hotel and a historical museum and a clinic that could do anything short of transplanting a heart” (49). The settlement accumulates striking diversity, with Thai workers harvesting “hydroponic tomatoes set in greenhouses” and a “core group of idealists” staying on during “the colony’s transformation into the bedroom community it had become” (49). These changes attracted “professors who drove to Be’er Sheva to teach,” “start-up types” who commuted to an industrial park in Jerusalem, and venture capital tycoons who commute to Europe. The settlement also houses those who don’t go anywhere, those who “lived on Japanese and Indian and American clocks, making trades or writing code,” for whom this hill is just as convenient as the next one (50). The hardcore ideological commitments of Rena and Yehudit, while lingering among “a core group of idealists,” give way to a panoply of reasons for moving to the settlement--“they came for the tax breaks. They came for the space. They came for the vistas and fresh air” (50). Englander’s story captures the mundane process of settlement growth as well as the apocalyptic strain that is part of its DNA.

Set in 2011, the final section of the story takes the form of a dialogue between a real estate agent and potential residents of the settlement. The violence of the Second Intifada is psychologically distant; the agent claims, “no need to even think about it. Really, put it out of your mind...Intifada Three starts, and I promise you, it won’t make a peep in your life” (71). Far

more pressing to their concerns are the reliability of the high speed Internet and the finish in the new kitchen units. Lisa, formerly of Cherry Hill, Pennsylvania, expresses a conviction that indicates a broader trend, “we don’t want the politics. I mean, the building is beautiful, and the area-it’s just stunning. But we’re not settlers. And we don’t want to be surrounded by that sort” (72). The settlement’s success has rendered Rena’s early sacrifice obsolete, and the barren hills and steadfast radicalism of the town’s beginning yields to the maturity of a crowded and normalized city. The paradoxes are rich, as the newest arrivals attest to the settlements’ success at ‘mainstreaming’ while making it clear they share none of its hard-edged founding ideology. In presenting this bourgeoisie belatedness, Englander traces the settlement into middle age, and our moment. The trajectory he traces of its development from outpost to suburb is both relentlessly linear but also multiple and varied. Both of these are qualities that help shape the expatriate experience the settlements house and foster.

### ***The Hilltop: Israel in Full***

Assaf Gavron is not a newcomer to the hilltop of Israeli literature. Before *The Hilltop*, he produced seven novels, one of which, *Almost Dead* (2010) was translated into English. *The Hilltop*, however, aims to make an impact on another latitude. Published in English by Simon and Schuster and hailed by the Israeli-based English language magazine *Time Out Tel Aviv* as “The Great Israeli Novel,” it leverages larger interest in Israeli politics and policies to create a story that provides an intimate perspective into the complex connectedness of Israeli society in precisely the place that would appear to be the most isolated, an illegal settlement deep in the West Bank.

*The Hilltop*’s title promises laser-like focus on one particular place, and indeed it shares with Englander’s *Sister Hills* a geographic orientation that generates a narrative. But Gavron’s

work is more complicated than that, and it is actually a constellation of places, presented in both their isolation and their complex connection. Ma'aleh Hermesh C, the illegal settlement that is the book's setting and primary protagonist, is legible in relation to the Arab village that abuts it and the use of a virtual reality Second Life that makes explicit some of its more extreme currents. It also delves into the life of Israelis outside of Israel. In doing all of these things, it serves as a larger map for many of the spaces surveyed here.

*The Hilltop*, in a strange and counterintuitive synecdoche, tells a story about *all* of Israel by focusing on the *least* representative part of the country. Ma'aleh Hermesh C is the nub of the connective tissue of the novel and the seams and ligaments of contemporary Israel. The settlement of Ma'aleh Hermesh C, the settlement on the hilltop that gives the novel its title and its name, is illegal and invisible, and only legible as the product of a vast and specific implication in nearly every sector of Israeli society; governmental, military, economic.

*The Hilltop* begins and ends in Ma'aleh Hermesh C, but in between delivers a capacious account of a wide swath of Israeli society. The structure is essentially two-fold. One strand offers a group portrait of the settlement, its population and fate, its negotiation with the authorities and the precariousness of its future. This trajectory begins with the settlements founding as an offshoot of an earlier, more established community, and ends with its simultaneous evacuation and reprieve. The second storyline revolves around two brothers, Roni and Gabi Kuper. Gavron traces their maturation and tense relationship from their kibbutz upbringing through their reunion in Ma'aleh Hermesh C. The settlement serves as refuge to them both, one a newly religious handyman with a troubled marital history, the other a ruined investment banker trying to craft a deal with the local Palestinian olive-growers for a line of boutique olive-oil. Besides the Kupers,

the other residents of the settlement have precious little backstory, as we meet them on the hill fully formed and activated.

The Kupers are different, their arcs longer and more geographically varied, running from a kibbutz in the Golan to Tel Aviv, New York, Hollywood, and back to the West Bank. With the former group, Gavron emphasizes the hilltop's isolation. With the latter, he links it to the mosaic of a life, and the tapestry of a country. The settlement- its rhythms, landscape, concerns, and personalities, becomes one option among many, a social organization with drawbacks and virtues. The most salient and extended comparison is between the kibbutz and the settlement, a contentious and fascinating debate as to the transmission and embodiment of the pioneering values encoded in the Zionist DNA

This agon is explicitly gestured towards in *The Hilltop*, with one of the settlement's stalwarts, Hilik Yisraeli, working on a doctorate on the failure of the kibbutz movement to sustain and transmit its values tentatively titled "Pioneering, Land Redemption, Ideology: The Pre-State Kibbutz Movement as a Failure-In-Waiting" (117). The implicit suggestion is that the settlement picks up where the kibbutz gave up, and that the pioneering spirit abides not in the Galilee, but in the rolling Judean Hills.

The fruit of this effort, the Ma'aleh Hermesh C is happy to absorb them because every new inhabitant is a new fact on the ground. Roni and Gabi find themselves and lose themselves in the settlement, which itself is always on the verge of disappearing. It's ~~its~~ not so much that they join a movement whose principles and history is of great interest to them- "the details of the political and legal history of the settlements elicited yawns,"-but rather that the ramshackle nature of the settlement allows space for reinvention of the self. And yet, only Gabi finds that bargain convincing. Roni, more worldly and more secular, "still bristled from the power outage

and the slow Internet service, and he wanted a haircut and a Diet Coke in a glass bottle and a cigarette and cashew nuts” (166). The power and Internet are particularly sore points in Ma’aleh Hermesh C. They are spotty because they have to be self-contained, as the illegality of the settlement prevents it from hooking up to the larger grid. In this much-scrutinized and politicized part of the world, every object, every caravan and electricity chord oscillates between legitimacy and illegality. Thus, “there was a transport permit for the mobile structure, but there was no construction permit or approval for its connection to any infrastructure” (39). The result of this hodgepodge state of affairs is, of course, that the trailer stays right where it is. Utilities signify legitimacy, and when the settlement is finally hooked up at the end of the book, its presence becomes assured.

There is a parable-like shape and sound to much of the novel, but it is also deeply interested in bureaucracy and process, governmental inefficiency and permit acquisition, the little lacunae with which the state unwinds its sovereignty. Ma’aleh Hermesh C is the eye of so much controversy, domestic and international, but also can only exist by people both turning a blind eye to it and watching out for it. It is visible to authorities only intermittently, but “makes it into Peace Now’s Outpost Monitoring Report” and “the interactive map on the *Haaretz* daily’s news website” (10). It pops in and out of view, appearing at one moment on the front pages of the *Washington Post* in an expose by an enterprising journalist, the next not even registering after a change in governing coalition.

The paradox of isolation and connectedness, which provides the novel with much of its satiric charm as well as its political force, loops into another binary that powers *The Hilltop*, the twin states of the permanent and the temporary. In its isolation the book’s stark landscape is permanence itself. The novel begins purposefully, Biblically; “in the beginning were the fields”

(3). Throughout, the contours of the land take us both out of history and further deeper into it; “an untamed landscape stretched out before them- the Judean desert in all its splendor and beauty...the mountains of Moab and Edom...and the homes of a large Palestinian town, some of which appeared wrapped in a giant gray concrete wall, like a gift that couldn’t be opened” (18).

The three layers of the geological, the Biblical, and the contemporary are delivered in one short paragraph, their proximity suggesting that they are not so much different historical strata as much as superimposed realities.

The land’s tendency to parade its immutability inspires its residents to do the same, loudly and defiantly announcing their intention to remain on the hilltop forever. The rub of course is how to ensure that permanence, how to lock it in. One way to do that is through growth, the augmenting presence of new recruits and internal expansion. The coda to the book’s first chapter, which hums with a Biblical cadence, observes “more babies were born on the hilltop, and thus, modern-day pioneering flourished, and Ma’aleh Hermesh C. grew and expanded” (11). The difficult with this strategy is that these gains are not necessarily durable, and can easily be reversed. The fundamental unit of the settlement is the caravan or trailer, which of course were originally designed for mobility and portability. They are parked, rather than rooted, on the Hilltop. The settlement exists in a state of limbo, always pending an appeal or a High Court injunction. A minister opposed to the continued existence of Ma’aleh Hermesh C exclaims that its residents “have settled there illegally, on private Palestinian land and a nature reserve, with an eviction order hanging over their heads, a petition against which was rejected recently by this very court...the illegal outpost of Ma’aleh Hermesh C doesn’t even appear on the map-“ (175). The settlement is doubly illegal, built on both private Palestinian land (the owner is in Egypt)

and a nature preserve set aside by the State of Israel. Its existence is objectionable precisely because it shouldn't exist, because for all intensive purposes it *doesn't* exist.

Paradoxically, it is precisely this contingency that provides the settlers and their community with a tensile strength, and this is another of the book's great insights. The settlement's staying power has very little to do with convincing others of the rightness of the cause and justness of the ideology as it does with its leadership's ability to manipulate the fragmentary operations of the State. This improvisation and pitting of agency against agency and minister against court is born of necessity, but it creates a state of administrative limbo that gives the settlement room to operate and space to grow.

This state of affairs is expressed succinctly towards the beginning of the book, where Othniel Assis, the leader of the settlement, explains the outpost's legality to Sheldon Mamelstein. The incoherence of the settlement as fact exists alongside the clarity as to its illegality, a tension that is never resolved, and is perhaps unresolvable. "As far as the Defense Ministry is concerned," Othniel explains, "the outpost has been evacuated; and as far as the army is concerned, there are Jews here and therefore a guard post and soldiers, too...fortunately for us, the right hand has no clue what the left one is doing." This is the contradictory state of affairs painted with the broadest strokes, but it is iterated on the more granular level as well, "The Settlement Division of the World Zionist Organization arranged for the establishment of the agricultural farm...through the Civil Administration they also secured the generator, and the army took care of the water supply"(24). The settlement is particularly successful in understanding the siloed and specialized nature of government agencies, and the ways that can be leveraged in realizing the different components of building a community.



There is an additional component to this strategy, as well, a recognition that there is a nebulous zone of funds and approval at the confluence of governmental and non-governmental agencies, where the State and the organizations affiliated with the Zionist project meet. The settlers themselves inhabit a mindset and zone that is at the physical and psychological boundaries of the state, whose tensions are most apparent in the settler's fraught relationship with the army that both protects them and is tasked with removing them.

As the only force guarding the settlers of Ma'aleh Heremesh C, the Army's protection is what makes life in the settlement possible. At the same time, the settlers view the army suspiciously because they know soldiers will eventually be the agents of the community's undoing. The starkness of this possibility is the antithesis of the piecemeal fashion in which the settlement is built, where "the National Infrastructures Ministry could instruct the Public Works Department to make good use of days when Civil Administration officials weren't patrolling the area, to lay down some asphalt." The struggle of the inhabitants of Ma'aleh Heremesh C is to reify these gains by so effectively utilizing the machinery of government that the army's potential to enforce the law is neutralized.

The army, however, is hardly neutral. Its ranks are comprised of citizens with ideological cross currents and predispositions, most of whom are sympathetic to the settler enterprise. Giora, the head of the IDF Central Command and the "de facto Prime Minister of the West Bank," is on Othniel Assisi's speed dial, and does whatever he can to protect the settlers. Captain Omer Levkovich, the officer with direct oversight over Ma'aleh Heremesh C, is initially sympathetic to the leaders of the settlement only to turn against them when he realizes their religious convictions makes them essentially incapable of negotiation. Specifically, the settlers constantly agitate for the army to crack down on attacks from the nearby Arab village, and when the army

does not, Ma'aleh Hermesh C's vigilantes take the law into their own hands, "Later that evening, the windshields of two vehicles in Majdal Tur were smashed, and a tire on one of the cars was set ablaze" (123). This kind of extra-judicial retribution compromises the IDF's monopoly on force in the territories, and

Gavron suggests that the set of difficulties that prevents the army from effectively evacuating the settlement stem in equal measure from Israel's fractured and self-canceling bureaucracies and the culture of the army and its relation to the civilian population. Due to mandatory conscription, every Israeli is a former, future, or current soldier, and thus the distinction between civilian and military is virtually effaced.

Finally, the most sustained encounter between the settlers and the army is also the least ideological, and involves Yoni, the Ethiopian soldier assigned to guard the outpost. Yoni is both part of the settlement community and outside of it, and not only because he stands at the physical threshold of Ma'aleh Hermesh C. His most profound commitment is to Othniel's daughter Gittit, with whom he has a clandestine relationship. When it is eventually found out (despite the starkly empty landscape, there is actually very little privacy in the settlement), Gittit is banished to an aggressively religious all-girls school elsewhere in Samaria. In an exquisitely painful irony, Yoni's last day of service is also the day the outpost is slated for demolition, heightening into direct and painful conflict his conflicted position as an embedded resident of the settlement who bears official responsibility to the State's army.

The larger implications of this tension relates to the above discussion of sovereignty. *The Hilltop*, although wry, at times satiric, and consistently good-humored, nevertheless 'pioneers' a strange space in Jewish life, one with no real precedent in all the forms and arrangements that have framed previous Jewish ways of living. Along with Taub and Gorenberg, Gavron offers a

fictional account of a way of life at the edge of the State, familiar with the still young and immature trappings of statehood that already seem worthy of contempt and manipulation by a population fired by Biblical imperatives rewritten into modernity. It can only exist as tangent to Israel, and yet its priorities threaten to, in Gorenberg's language, "undo" the first Jewish commonwealth in two thousand years. Ma'aleh Hermesh C's unstable relation to permanence and temporariness threatens to be contagious; its isolation is a quarantine that only further incubates its ideological pathologies. Aiding and abetting this process is a government that still speaks the language of pre-state pioneering when it is politically advantageous. At a photo-op, the Minister of Defense intones "the government in which I serve will not lend its hand to the uprooting of any settlements...that sustains the Land of Israel, the value of settling the land and of work...this is the true Israel, the Zionist, the pioneering" (180). These platitudes, cynically deployed, feed into the cycle of expectation and disappointment that structures the settlement's relationship to the State.

An essential component of Gavron's larger argument about what Adam Kirsch calls "the kinds of life contemporary Israel makes possible for the dedicated and ambitious" is a dynamic relation between isolation and connectedness (*Tablet Magazine*, 10/29/2014). This relates not only to the general state of things in the modern world, but also to the distorting dynamics that govern Israel's status as a lightning rod in the realm of public opinion, and its outsized presence in international media and in the protocols of public attention, where "the rustling of a newspaper in Washington" leads to "a huge storm over the Judean hills" (187). The strangeness of these causalities are of more than passing interest in *The Hilltop*, and their centrality acknowledges Israel as a media trope, and the West Bank as a place that coexists in a small hilly corner of the Middle East and the four cubits of the editorial page of the *Washington Post*. In *The Hilltop*, the

Washington Post journalist Jeff McKinney stumbles on the settlement, and eventually pitches and composes an investigative piece that targets the legality of its practices and the source of its funding. However, as McKinley quickly realizes, “Another Jewish American millionaire giving money to another West Bank settlement” is “not exactly the scoop of the decade” (184). His story really takes off with an unlikely and farcical incident that is both contrived and highly representative of the complexities of competing interests in an area where everything is theoretically regulated and scrutinized but nothing seems truly ordered.

Israel-in-the-media is of a piece with a larger portrait of the American dimensions of the settlement, which extend in several directions, less a conspiracy than an interlocking and sometimes contradictory collection of interests. It is no coincidence that two Americans feature very prominently at the beginning of *The Hilltop*, and that they are a journalist and philanthropist respectively. The latter, Sheldon Mamelstein, is there to donate a playground, and the former is there because he got lost, and stumbles into a story.

The kinds of connections Gavron presents are not limited to the impact of American perceptions and cash on lived Israeli realities. Like Nevo’s *Neuland* *The Hilltop* devotes substantial time to the Israeli experience *outside* of Israel. Here too, the linked paradigms of isolation/connection and permanent/temporary are active. Both brothers, Roni and Gabi, leave Israel because they find it too confining, but both find experiences in America that are defined by integration into existing expat Israeli social circles. These social arrangements, in turn, reflect back on the society on *The Hilltop*, mostly through vivid and dramatic contrast. These groups form around commonalities of culture and language but are distinctively portable and focused on economic advancement. They fall into three primary cohorts: the first, centered on the moving

business in NYC (anyone who has seen a “Moishe’s Moving” truck or visited one of their storage facilities knows that Gavron cuts close to life here); the second, the world of philanthropy and Jewish organizations, located in Miami; and the third, high tech entrepreneurs and hot-shot traders in New York City. The range of these ‘tribes’ of relocated Israelis provides a sketch-shorthand for the varieties of the Israeli Diaspora in the United States, which numbers over one hundred thousand people<sup>4</sup>. These groups signify not only a wide socio-economic diversity, but also speak to the idiosyncrasies of the Israeli relation to the United States. Gavron senses that contra traditional Zionist ideology, *yeridah*, the act of moving from Israel elsewhere, is not an act of inexplicable cowardice but rather part of living in an interconnected world.

The nature of these connections is varied and multifaceted. The gruff movers who transport the wealthy Jewish Agency fundraisers things down to Florida are in many senses less assimilated, it is Gabi’s evident Israeliness that enables him to be such an effective fundraiser for the organization; back in Israel, he is a marginal member of society, expelled from the army and increasingly unwelcome in the *kibbutz* in which he grew up. In South Florida, he is the myth of the *Sabra* brought to life. In the warm, palm-tree studded environs of Palm Beach that echo Tel Aviv, Gabi is able to exult and capitalize on his Israeliness in a way he never could in Israel.

Roni’s sojourn in America is of a different sort- he joins a world that contains a different kind of tribe, that of high finance. As compellingly narrated by Gavron, this is a world entirely devoid of the kinds of ideological thinking that prevail on the hilltop. At the same time, however, its manias are no less impacted and thoroughgoing. What is interesting here, even in this commerce driven environment, is the continued stickiness of Israeli solidarity, present here as an informal social gathering called “The Hummus Club,” where Israelis in finance, tech, and

---

<sup>4</sup> The exact figure is the subject of much controversy. See Cohen, Debra. “How Many Israelis are in America? Let Us Count the Ways to Answer That.” *Haaretz*. July 20 2015.

consulting drink Goldstars, an iconic Israeli beer, and share market tips. This exchange is both lucrative and increasingly problematic, as Roni becomes ensnared in a cascading sequence of questionable deals and back dealing.

The fates of Roni and Gabi in America sharpen two possible trajectories available to Israelis abroad. Gabi lives at the somewhat lucrative intersection of American and Israeli relations, raising money for the organizations that link American Jews to projects in Israel. Roni inhabits the extraordinarily lucrative world of pre-recession Wall Street, which is both entirely divorced from blood and soil and dependent on small ethnic bands like the Hummus Club to circulate information and lubricate the relation between companies and industries. As Gavron writes, “Roni’s trump card was his Israeli connections. They were networked across the entire continent, not only in the world of finance but also in industry, the energy firms, and of course in tech” (341). It is Israel’s smallness, its almost claustrophobic and *shtetl*-like set of relations that is so advantageous to Roni in navigating enormous, extraordinarily lucrative networks.

For both Roni and Gabi, leaving Israel is a prelude towards being partially defined by Israeli-ness and joining a distinctly Israeli ‘diaspora’ that remains intact for equal parts pragmatic and cultural considerations. It’s<sup>its</sup> no coincidence that both of them repair to the hilltop after their respective sojourns in the United States, but<sup>it</sup> they do so with very different postures, Gabi as a *baal-teshuva*, a newly but fervently religious Jew, and Roni as a battered and beaten financier run out of town by shady deals and burst bubbles. The former becomes a builder and prayer; the latter, perhaps predictably, hatches a scheme to mass-produce and sell olive oil from the nearby Palestinian village to the high-end boutiques of Tel Aviv. The project naturally raises suspicion in the settlement, but that isn’t the reason it fails. It founders because of the last minute intervention of a group of well-heeled Japanese business conglomerate who buy the village’s

entire olive oil industry outright for a far better price than Roni can provide. Roni's business relationship with Musa, a resident of Kharmish, is a quick beam of coexistence, but it pales in comparison to the far more persuasive pleading of Japanese yen.

One of Gavron's strategies for dramatizing the paradox of networked connection and dramatic isolation is through the incorporation of virtual reality. Othniel's son, Yakir is an avid player of Second Life, enabled by his access to the family computer. Othniel needs his son's technical expertise to manage the settlement's thriving produce business, but Yakir is more absorbed in the possibilities offered by the anonymity of this alternative space.

Yakir's avatar on Second Life was a settler who looked a little like him with the addition of a beard, and he found a number of friends, like-minded religious Zionist Jews, and together they'd settled on an island they'd named Revival, and they'd erected a synagogue and prayed and spoke and roamed the world keeping the flame alive" (168).

Yakir is anonymous in the game, but he is also very much himself, or how he sees himself. As with so much on the Internet, the freedom of anonymity collides with the pleasures of community and recognition. Just as his father founded Ma'aleh Hermesh C in an 'empty' space with a small band of like minded compatriots, so too Yakir gets to be a pioneer of virtual territory and a constructed landscape. Second life is not only geographical, however, it also allows for the acting out of the kinds of resentments and pressures that pervade life in Ma'aleh Hermesh C- "Yakir's friends were about to visit Islam-Online, one of the Muslim sectors on Second Life, to mess with the Arabs a little." This is both a fantasy and an accurate reflection of reality, as tensions with the neighboring Arab village are an ever-present possibility.

Things escalate in Second Life when Yakir falls in with an avatar called 'King Meir,' who Yakir presumes is a "thirty-six-year-old lawyer from Dallas, Texas, which explained how he was able to lease the virtual island, Revival, for two hundred real dollars a month" (173). It is a Beta version of life- the rich American facilitating the purchase of land (recall Sheldon

Mamelstein's playground, at the heart of the settlement)- in this version it is clearly a Christian evangelical. The name of their enclave, 'Revival,' is a clever joke in two directions. It alludes to King Meir's evangelical convictions, but it is also a currently defunct Israeli right-wing political party that arose in reaction to the evacuation from Sinai in the late 1970's and was closely affiliated with Gush Emunim, the settler movement.

Yakir is the only member of his band who actually lives in a settlement. The others do so only vicariously, but their passion for anti-Arab action and right wing grandstanding runs strong. They decide to carry out a series of attacks against Muslim targets, a series of operations that strongly echoes with the efforts of the 'Jewish Underground,' a terrorist cell active in the late 1980's that planned to detonate a bomb inside the Dome of the Rock. That scheme was disrupted by the IDF, but the benefit of Second Life is that Yakir and his friends can dispense with the inhibitions of legality. Thus, the virtual settlement is "off-limits to foreigners- Christians, Ishmaelites, Amalekites, and anyone else who dared to challenge the laws of the place" (193). The use of Biblical names suggest an atavistic desire for a different kind of political order, a sense that even life in the Biblical heartland of Judea is not raw or intense enough.

Like many fundamentalist cocktails, this one incorporates both an antiquarian set of passions and a distinctly modern brew of anxieties. Not only is it online, but King Meir moves around digital space garbed in a "Kach" shirt, the yellow and black outfit of the movement and political party generated by Rabbi Meir Kahane, a radically right-wing Brooklyn-born activist. As Yossi Klein Halevi describes in *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist*, this message found fertile soil in among a cohort largely comprised of children of Holocaust survivors searching for a brand of Jewish power. Kahane gained traction in a particularly American context, only to import his brand of politics into the Israeli political sphere before being banned from



participating in the Knesset in 1984. In *Second Life*, King Meir convinces Yakir to plan and execute a terrorist ‘attack,’ unleashing a thousand pixilated Stars of David inside a virtual mosque.

Yakir, more a naïve and angsty adolescent than a hardened ideologue, is thus presented with a swirl of concepts foreign and intimate that reflects the cultural currents he would experience as a child of Ma’aleh Hermesh C. At the same time however, the Internet allows him to associate with an international cohort of similar ideological convictions but widely disparate backgrounds; it ghettoizes even as it connects along a narrow band of affiliation. But Yakir’s online exploration does not continue in the same direction with which it began. He recoils from the radicalism of King Meir and his gang, and instead begins exploring the secular world outside of the confines of the settlements, precipitating and signaling a process of significant soul-searching. By the end of the book it has become apparent that his future does not rest on the hilltop nor in the fervid fantasies of right wing web-zealots, but somewhere out in the wider vistas of Israeli society.

*The Hilltop’s* conclusion dramatizes several of these themes in a cataclysm that is also a power re-inscription of the status quo. The long-delayed but ever present possibility of evacuation finally reaches fever pitch, but it is at the very instant when the settlement begins to disappear from the landscape that it acquires an entirely new dimension of permanence. The evacuation coincides with the Jewish holiday of Purim, a time of revelry and an intentional accentuation of the absurd. A rabbinic dictum that has become a popular song and no doubt would have been sung by celebrants in religious communities like Maaleh Hermesh C bouncily proclaims the imperative to become so drunk as to lose track of the distinction between “Blessed

Mordechai and Cursed Haman”- to entirely lose one’s bearings and see the world as topsy turvy, absurdly inverted.

This atmosphere of antic inversion is employed in the service of one final and grand irony. The army begins the evacuation, and Gavron deploys a kind of free indirect discourse to articulate the community’s reaction- “What the hell. And why right now. And what insensitivity. And what ugly provocation. And how come we’re the ones who are singled out while the Arabs are free to build as they please” (435). Meanwhile, Roni and Yakir have been sent by Othniel to Kharmish. And their presence in outlandish costume precipitates a riot that distracts the IDF at the precise instant when they begin dismantling the settlement.

The result, of course, is that the army gives up the project of uprooting the settlement altogether; in the face of an ostensible ‘security threat,’ the settlement secures a final permanence, as it becomes politically impossible to remove. This permanence will be inscribed in the only language that matters in the settlement; “a new control panel and a spanking new fuse-box” (443). The way things proceed have a species of logic to them. The delivery of a Purim basket to Kharmish “led to the mother of all Arab riots...and the postponement of the evacuation to an as-yet-undetermined date” (444). In the space left by this ambiguity, the government falls, a new road is paved to make way for easier security transports, and generals in charge are promoted up and out of the territories back to “middle-class Israel, the center of consensus” (444). At the edge of consensus, the settlement becomes a flourishing producer of boutique dairy products, the investigative glare of the *Washington Post* turns elsewhere, and rhythms are established- “winds will change, and days will end, and life will go on...and in between work, and prayer, and rest, and love” (448). The detailed timelines of logistical operations and the seasonal interludes of holidays give way to a deep experience of the sort Ilene

Prusher describes in a recent review, “a timeless landscape, neither oppressed nor oppressing” (1/25/15).

Like much of this book, the tone of this final take is difficult to discern. Whatever it is, it is distinct from Reich’s broad caricatures and Englander’s fable-like prose. Tone and style are important here not only for their literary significance, but for what they encode regarding the exceedingly high ideological and political stakes. Gavron’s book, while crammed with characters, moments of inwardness, and an interest in personal evolution, is ultimately a combination of a group biography and sociological investigation. The settlement endures because of a matrix of factors that includes incredible persistence and self-sacrifice, a governmental apparatus that is ideologically conflicted and bureaucratically sclerotic, and a comedy of errors that seems both haphazard and somehow inevitable. In an odd sort of way, the settlement, like many of the places toured in this chapter, is both “in the middle of nowhere” and “in the middle of everything,” so consistently impermanent that it will never, ever go away.

The accounts given by Roth, Reich, Papernick, Englander, and Gavron, and others talk back to the narratives we tell about the American Dream and the Jewish American experience, re-envisioning the concepts of immigration, home ownership, and community building in a radically different environment. They go further, however, in sketching new literary representations of Jewish identity that are fomented in the contested space of the settlements, largely written by authors who do not themselves belong to this world. These transformations need to be engaged by scholars and literary theorists for two primary reasons. Firstly, to broaden our conception of what contemporary Jewish culture looks like and means. Secondly, in order to expand on the contemporary understanding of American expatriotism and expatriotism more broadly. As this population in the West Bank enters its third generation, and begins producing its

own politicians, generals, and authors, its import will only grow, both within the Israeli context and in its relation to its American origins, in no doubt unpredictable ways. It is in the unique potential of narrative that allows us to understand physical and conceptual spaces as rich as the swirling vortex of diaspora, homeland, settlement, and the radically unsettled future.

## II. Israel Journeys

While the other chapters of this project think of Israel as *a* place that stands *in* place, these texts pass through something more akin to an airport terminal; they are concerned with destinations, but really animated by comings and goings, the eloquence that comes with relocating and heading Rilke's injunction to "change your life," for a summer, semester, or forever. These Arrivals and Departures bring together several different types of travelers, from the casual backpackers to the anguished movers, saying goodbye forever or 'I'll see you soon.' Behind all of these travelers lies an extensive infrastructure of critical and scholarly writing on travel, tourism, expatriotism, and authenticity. But there is also a rich and detailed literary invocation of the indignities and exhilarations to which every traveler is heir. In Hebrew, the word '*derech*' both means a specific route and a path in a more general and comprehensive sense; a philosophy of life, a way of being in the world. A way to get to where you are going, and a way to know you are going to the right place.

Characters in all of the books that populate this section eventually happen upon the fork in the road in the middle of their *derech*; they all seek to put their own peregrinations into relation to more heavily trodden routes. This is where the individual traveler in search of authenticity encounters some version of Kant's categorical imperative, of course expressed in far more colloquial terms; to what extent is my journey a critique of others staying put? Is where I have determined to settle where Jews should be, generally?

As elsewhere, Israel sharpens the stakes and heightens the decisions these books stage and explore. The reason why is a specialized directional vocabulary that places all movement in

relation to Israel. *Aliyah* is the term traditionally associated with moving to Israel, from everywhere and anywhere else in the world. To ‘make *aliyah*’ has become shorthand for moving to Israel. The term is actually a conceptual and territorial expansion from the Biblical ritual of *aliyah l’regei*, the commandment for Jews from all over the Land of Israel to bring offerings to the Temple in Jerusalem on the Pilgrimage Festivals. *Aliyah*, which speaks to ascent rather than sheer distance covered, took the elevated altitude of Jerusalem relative to the surrounding region as its defining perspective. That vertical sensibility remains in force with contemporary usage of *aliyah* and its inverse *yeridah*, or literally ‘going down’ from Israel to anywhere else in the world. This translation of essentially horizontal movements into vertical moves superimposes a kind of judgment on Jewish geography. ‘Up’ and ‘down’ are directions for drawing a specific kind of map that puts Israel squarely at the center, elevated.

To be sure, this is a view of the world that is almost too ripe for revision and refutation. For example, a strong diasporist or a committed globalist would chafe at Israel’s pride of place in such a scheme, and a contemporary backpacker or tourist would recoil at the idea that moving is overlaid with such strong signposting, which seems out of place in an interconnected, Skyped, WhatsApped world. Each of these books presupposes a certain ease of travel, the ability to hop on a plane and be somewhere else relatively instantly. The journeys that crisscross their pages are unimaginable without the apparatus of modern air travel.

Still, what is noteworthy about these books is the extent to which the old narratives still retain their structuring capacity, and creakily but effectively expand their thematic circumferences. For this reason, it makes sense to use *aliyah* and *yeridah* as broad sections. The first of these consist of memoirs, written exclusively by Americans that describe their process of moving to Israel, and advocating for others to do the same. It is not self-evident that there would

be such a genre; American *aliyah* has always been a demographic trickle but an ideological vanguard, precisely because moving from America to Israel has always been a choice rather than an exigency due to persecution.

This chapter, following the peregrinations of a movement that dreamed of a homeland in Minsk and Moscow, and populated its state with natives of Addis and Baghdad, will roam widely across authors, geographies, and thematic categories. Zionism, as much as it has come to mean the building of a state, is perhaps even more invested in the processes of emigration and immigration that populate that state and draw people towards its visions of Jewish political organization. Even as it seeks to centralize and consolidate the varieties of Jewish experience, it depends on a dynamic and continual process of not only recruitment and absorption, but also of yearning and aspiration.

While each of these texts necessarily incorporates multiple locations owing to their focus on the kinetics of movement, they slot satisfyingly if imperfectly into three groupings. The first of these, Americans making and urging *aliyah*, is the most extensive because it forms the core of this investigation and because it comprises a defined genre-cohort. Hillel Halkin, Daniel Gordis, and Michael Oren all navigate the relationship between Israel and American Jewry with books aimed squarely at United States readerships, pressing relocation to Israel.

Eshkol Nevo's *Neuland* opens up the conversation from another angle. It is a sprawling and probing look at *yeridah* within a robust narrative framework that also convenes provocative invocations of Zionist history and a colorful description of Israeli backpacking culture that kaleidoscope authenticity in all kinds of dimensions. *Neuland* is largely a book about finding intentional and still carefully connected expatriates; an Israeliness outside of Israel. This argument, as it unspools over the course of the novel, goes something like this- life in Israel has

become nearly unbearable because of violent trauma and claustrophobia. The solution is to disaggregate Israeliness from Israel by transposing it onto the planes and pampas of Argentina. While expatriotism can suffer from an anxiety of inauthenticity, *Neuland* suggests that it is actually at this remove that the best of Israel can be salvaged and recovered. The various storylines conspire to provide a different perspective on Israel, not as a beckoning destination or a redemptive hope but as a difficult, small country that demands much from its citizens. The authentic Israeli condition is PTSD. Recovery means relocation. Ayelet Tsabari's story *The Best Place on Earth* further explores the tonalities and tensions of *yeridah*, this time not in the warmer south of Argentina but in the chilly beauty of rural Canada. Together, they trace Israeliness into the Western hemisphere, and the non-United States Americas.

*Yeridah* is directionally opposite but conceptually congruent. Primarily undertaken by Israelis, it speaks critically to Israel and challenges a potent mythology even as it links Israel with the broader world and diffuses and seeds Israeli culture far from the Mediterranean, from movers in Long Island City to diamond salesmen on 46<sup>th</sup> Street to restaurateurs in Philadelphia. It is a powerfully freighted term. Jonathan Sacks has described them as a group "alienated from the diaspora's religious institutions of Jewish continuity, regarded as betrayers of Zionism by Israel itself, they are Jews whose identity is wholly defined in terms of living in a land from which they are absent" (11). Still, they are perhaps the prime emissaries and diffusers of Israeli culture, and despite Sacks's musing that they "appear to be almost the first group since the lost ten tribes to have no theoretical basis for their Jewish survival," *Yordim* are reconfiguring the relationship between Israel and the diaspora even as they are impelled by a cocktail of reasons ranging from the distinctly ideological young man unsettled by his army service to the aspiring musician who thinks she can make more money busquing in Berlin than Tel Aviv. Ayelet



Tsabari's *The Best Place on Earth* paints a nuanced picture of *yeridah*, the fashion in which it can create an absence of identity that is by turns liberating and bewildering.

For the American writers, this zone takes the form of sabbatical years or extended trips back to the States. For Nevo, it is the extended backpacking trip and the alternative community of Neuland itself, poised between purposeful expatriation and permanent vacation. It is my contention that the legend to read this geographical map is etched into an ongoing conversation about contemporary options for Jewish authenticity. Like the angels in Jacob's famous dream from the Book of Genesis, the goings up and comings down of these mobile characters are vectors complex in their directionality, inscribing and effacing the points of reference that would enable us to chart their course across the night sky.

While Jewish American authors have consistently imagined Israel in their fictions, there is also a rich body of non-fictional material that has sought to document and iterate this relationship. Works by current American-Israelis like Hillel Halkin, Daniel Gordis, and others perform crucial transnational work by explaining Israel to an American audience through their own experience of emigration. These texts function as both memoir and polemic, and adumbrate the fictional depictions studied elsewhere in this thesis by illustrating how these American writers tell their own Israeli stories. Reading them together plunges the American reader into a specific kind of argument about the contours of the authentic North American Jewish life in the late twentieth century. While these texts stress the rupture and disjunction that come with moving from the United States to Israel, they simultaneously evince strong continuities with that setting and those sensibilities. Thus, these accounts of leaving America say more about the Jewish American experience that is left behind than the Israeli one that is found. Two major claims will structure the discussion of these texts. First, that these memoirists all seek a life of

greater authenticity, specifically in the realm of Jewish life and practice. Secondly, these writers all see *aliyah* as the answer to this crisis of Jewish authenticity within an American context, an Israeli answer to a specifically American set of questions.

Perhaps more than any other group of texts, these non-fictional accounts of American's relationship to Israel find their voice in the intermediate space between countries and are dependent on a bi-national focus. Written in Israel back towards the United States, they largely affirm their commitment to life in Israel while also meditating on American identity. While often intensely personal, these writers situate themselves in a broader context built from events both national (*intifadas*, 9/11, the Six Day War) and the rhythms of family life. Most of all, these accounts contribute to a burgeoning body of *aliyah* literature, a loose confederation of writers living and describing this phenomenon. The dramas of leaving, relocation, absorption, and 'Israelification' are all inlaid with reflections on purpose, meaning, and strong Zionist ideology.

Narrative craft is essential to these books because these authors not only think of themselves as *crafting* a story, but as *joining* one. By linking their own experience to the broader Israeli narrative. However, this larger context is presented in particularly American terms, delivered to an American audience. To be sure, the terms by which this argument is made change over time, and Halkin, Chertok, Gordis, and others are all very different thinkers and stylists. At the same time, these books, which have not been consistently studied as a cohort, display a remarkable consistency and constitute an important apparatus for the possibility of Israel as a viable option within an American life. This consistency alternates with temporal accents that provide windows into the specific anxieties of American and Israeli life over the last forty-five years. Collectively, they create a genre that offers a two-way mirror into the vulnerabilities and psychology of the American Jewish life its push and pull relation to the Israeli offer. Even as

these writers come down firmly on the side of the latter option, the nature of their audience and the demographic reality ensure that their readerships will decide for the former.

In interesting ways, then, these texts preach to both the choir and the unconverted, who turn out to be one and the same, American Jewry widely or narrowly defined.

A quick word on genre. Notably, two of these texts are epistolary, although they reflect changing technology; Halkin wrote letters in the 1970's (the book's cover actually included the depiction of a stamp) while Gordis's chapters were originally emails from the early aughts. The other books dispense with this origin or pretense and present as straightforward memoir. Halkin's correspondent is imaginary, while Gordis writes to family and friends who are always named. Both use the form of the letter to generate personal intensity but also speak more generally to the suite of concerns and tally of pros and cons that inevitably lie behind the decision to emigrate. Nearly all of these texts frame the move to Israel in specifically American terms, and nearly all of them mobilize arguments that revolve around authenticity and refashioning made in a particularly American accent. Thus, these writers urge a move away from America by using American ideas and idioms.

This search for authenticity must be understood on two levels, which are themselves implicated with one another. The first relates to the language and frameworks of American life. These include building a family, raising children, buying a house, and building a career. In all of these texts, these categories are explored and then relocated to a specifically Israeli context. All of the protagonists of these memoirs move to Israel some time in middle age rather than as young people, and thus all of them need to sort through the implications of the move for their families and professional aspirations. To be sure, this sorting is a staple of immigrant literature across many times and places, and here it acquires a particularly Israeli flavor.

At the same time, these authors consistently participate in a different kind of discourse on authenticity, one that places the American and Israeli options in dialogue under the heading of Jewish history and identity. In this mode, Halkin, Gordis, England and Oren all join a debate that is simultaneously very abstract and exceedingly intimate- how and where to be a Jew, a pair of questions that for these American born thinkers inevitably serves as a referendum on both the place of their birth and the land of their choosing.

### ***Home To Stay: Americans Abroad***

Daniel Gordis's *Home to Stay*, originally published as *If A Place Could Make You Cry*, self-consciously admits the accidental circumstances of its birth as a collection of emails and letters Gordis originally composed to his friends and family during a year long sabbatical in Israel that later evolved into a permanent move. Not originally intended for publication, these missives began to circulate on email lists and eventually appeared in venues like *The New York Times Magazine* before being collected into a book in 2002. Gordis's primary prism for evaluating the experience of moving to Israel is the family, and specifically the experiences of his children. Thus, many of his reflections on the possibilities of Jewish authenticity in America and Israel center on the locus of child rearing and education.

The drama of *Home To Stay* lies in Gordis's slowly dawning realization of the kind of life available in Israel and the possibilities for authenticity that it affords. It is no coincidence that the book begins with a meditation on the experience of learning about 9/11 while abroad. The catastrophe provides a set piece for thinking through narratives in an especially stark and emotional freighted way, but it is not the only time that Gordis's narrative employs a bifocal gaze, constantly comparing life in Israel with the experience of living in the United States. The choreography of this comparison is rather straightforward, and adds up to a running tally of

differences played out as both a before/after comparison and as a sustained counterfactual, as Gordis imagines a parallel life. It's sometimes difficult to tell whether the Israeli or American version is the alternative life; Gordis is firmly rooted in Israel, but constantly imagines the trajectory of his Los Angeles existence as informing and clarifying his Israel experience.

By and large Gordis sees Israeli authenticity as adhering in the communal and societal manifestations of Jewish life and culture, which he traces through his own engagement with Israelis but also in the shifting perspectives of his children.

*Home To Stay* spans a little more than a year, but it is an important year in the recent history of Israel and one that heightens and sharpens the contours and stakes of the story Gordis is trying to tell. He arrives in an Israel he thinks is on the brink of peace. In this context, 'becoming Israeli' involves adjusting to Israeli life. It is a story of assimilation. What strikes Gordis the most is the relative security of his Jerusalem neighborhood as opposed to the norms around child supervision in Los Angeles. In these early months of his sabbatical and subsequent *aliyah*, attaining Israeli authenticity is mostly a matter of fitting in- making friends, stretching the circumference of Jewish identity within the parameters of a Jewish State.

While the challenges and opportunities of being Jewish in Israel are an abiding theme in *Home To Stay* and throughout Gordis's work, the letters and e-mails that weave together to comprise this book shift towards a different angle on Israeli authenticity as the Second Intifada grows increasingly violent and protracted.

While the potential for violence and relations with Palestinians is never very far away, the emergence of these subjects into the foreground constitutes not only a subject change, but also a new choreography of belonging and authenticity. As Jerusalem increasingly resembles a war zone and the differences between Israel and America become increasingly stark, becoming

authentically Israeli involves becoming initiated into a specific vortex of militarism and vulnerability.

What emerges, then, are two large overlapping but not identical spheres of Israeli authenticity. The first is essentially the authenticity that comes with being a citizen in a Jewish majority and centers on the linguistic and cultural forms Gordis experiences as uniquely possible in a Jewish polity. Gordis feels this most acutely around holidays like *Lag B'Omer* and *Hanukkah*, which are celebrated in the public rather than the private sphere. This brand of authenticity is linked to its uniqueness as the only Jewish nation-state. By and large this sort of authenticity is the specific achievement of the Zionist project, whose multiple strands were woven together around the tangible benefits presented by public Jewish life.

The second variety of authenticity Gordis explores is less tied to the positive and perennial aspects of Israeliness that draws him to Israel than the specific spasm of violence that begins while he is there. Gordis comes to identify living with the violence as a kind of earned authenticity. He calls it “the circle of blood” and being inside its circumference generates several key shifts in how Gordis understands Israel and its place there. These shifts are most marked when Gordis meditates on his political convictions, which swerve in a more conservative direction. This change *within* Gordis becomes the substance of the difference *between* the two interlocutors in Halkin’s *Letters to An American Jewish Friend*, to which we now turn.

### ***Letters to an American Jewish Friend: Epistolary Zionism***

While Hillel Halkin’s *Letters to An American Jewish Friend*, first published in 1977 is the oldest work surveyed here, in another sense it is the most current, having just been reissued in 2013 by Gefen Publishing House. Halkin’s book is essential reading for several reasons, not the least of which is its importance for subsequent authors in the genre. Entirely epistolary and

comprised of six long letters, it presents just one side of the correspondence with the imagined ‘American Jewish Friend’ of the title. Unlike the subsequent books discussed here, Halkin’s is less memoir and more ideological argumentation, although it does mobilize the personal in the service of a broader condemnation of the possibilities and future of American Jewry. It is an invaluable document that offers a reading of Jewish American culture from the inside, condemns it for a lack of authenticity, and then proposes *aliyah* as the inevitable and desirable destination not just for the author, but for the larger part of American Jewry.

*Letters To An American Jewish Friend* is a powerful polemic that is sharply etched in late 1970’s culture, both Jewish and American. It is an argument for *aliyah* that relies heavily on a reading of Jewish American culture current at its competition. While many of the fictional characters in the novels discussed elsewhere inhabit and react to this milieu from the *inside*, Halkin analyzes it from the *outside*, striking out rhetorical ground claimed when he left American Jewry as participant and stakeholder. Before diving into the original circumstances of *Letters*, it is worth noting its 2013 reprint by Gefen books, giving it purchase on our own moment as well. My reading of it here will account for this double relevancy. While a new introduction by Halkin and a flurry of responses to the reissue published in the online magazine “Mosaic” aim to reassess its arguments and relevance, they do not fully account for its enduring potency in the conversation about Jewish authenticity. To be sure, Halkin marshals a wide range of appeals coalescing around the push from America and the pull towards Israel, but I argue that they interlock around a core claim about what it means to be authentically Jewish. In a newly composed introduction, Halkin signals this goal. He writes, “I had never thought I could convince American Jews to move to Israel by writing a book. I had thought that I might help start an argument that was missing from American Jewish life.” Of course, these are not entirely

unrelated, but the emphasis on the latter ties the problem of authenticity to the shortcomings of Jewish American civilization.

The centrality of this critique is anecdotally confirmed when Halkin reports receiving a letter from a reader that Halkin reproduces, “Thank you for helping me find my way home. An ~~American~~ Israeli Jewish friend.” Halkin’s aspiration and the response it elicited are at first blush almost crudely straightforward; he urges a move to Israel, betting on the latter location for a more fulfilled Jewish present and a more robust future. The line struck through ‘American,’ however, signposts a more complicated story. ‘American,’ ‘Israeli,’ and ‘Jewish’ are stacked contiguously like so many building blocks, all in a jumble. ‘American’ is both there and not there, canceled but still legible.

While Gordis focuses largely on Israel and engages America only obliquely and by inference, Halkin’s book depends on a fuller read of American life, on multiple levels. The first is an ideological and institutional account, evident in passages that argue that American Zionism, “unlike the European Zionism that led to Israel’s creation, it was not a movement of self-actualization. It was one of helping others, of philanthropy and political support.” At the same time, Halkin weaves his own migration as linked up to a wider migratory stream that is distinctly American and indigenous to the upheavals of the late 1960’s. “I don’t remember,” he admits, “thinking at the time that our own decision made us part of a wave,” he recalls.

Or rather, if it did, the wave was of young New Yorkers like ourselves, products of the 1960’s, leaving a city we had had enough of for the challenge and excitement of other places. Some went to live in rural New England or New Mexico; we moved to Israel. The life we chose for ourselves did not seem so different from what others were choosing in America

Halkin teases apart specifically Jewish *aliyah* to Israel from American geographic mobility while also superimposing the two, embedding his story in a broader framework of late 1960’s



resettlement. Halkin's emigration both absents him from the American story and makes him a full participant in it as his Zionist manifesto is pronounced with an American accent. This hybrid approach both speaks to contemporary social formations and shades into the mythical. "Soon after arriving," Halkin relates, "we bought land in a small farming village and set about building a house on it; Jerusalem by way of Jefferson. This ambivalence is woven throughout Halkin's argument, and not just his. It is constitutive of so many of these writers. Their quest for authenticity leads them to abjure America for Israel but is also expressed in terms that suggest a drive towards a peculiarly American vision of an authentic life.

There is a second level to Halkin's dance with authenticity, and that has to do with his own experience, that of his composite fictional correspondent 'A', and the broader readership of the book. These latter two groups he describes as Jews deeply invested in Jewishness unable to entertain acting fully on these commitments. He both claims to respect the integrity of this demographic while also indicting American Jews on a large scale- "But then American Jewish life had always seemed to me to be one of rationalization. Even as a boy, it had struck me as one of play-acting. Israel was genuine." Moving to Israel is both the natural inclination for the otherwise committed Jewish life *and* the only authentic alternative to that life.

Before moving to the fate of the book, it is worth exploring how these arguments unfold in the *Letters*. The book consists of six epistles knit together, with each one tackling a broad subject of argumentation. The first letter begins, strategically, with an extended account of Halkin's reserve duty on the Lebanon border. Rather than lead off with abstract argumentation, embodied experience gives Halkin a certain authority. The choice to begin with reserve duty is not inconsequential- it marks off Israeli from American life in a particularly stark way as both obligatory and rote, a kind of resented national glue. Within the reserves experience, Halkin

greet his correspondent and his reader with a *hamsin*, harsh and local to the Middle East. The *hamsin* blows in as a kind of argument towards authenticity, an opening salvo that suggests ‘you had to be there’ and sets the tone for the polemic that follows. ‘You had to be there’ moves towards ‘why you should be there,’ the case that Halkin endeavors to make to his correspondent.

Halkin addresses his correspondent as ‘homo turisticus,’ but this is a veteran tourist. “You have been twice to Israel,” Halkin acknowledges, “you have traveled the length and breadth of the country...you have swam in the Red Sea, the Dead Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea- but you have never been rained on by a single raindrop here, or smelled an orange grove blooming in springtime” (2). This have/ have not structure telegraphs the presence of an argument over authenticity. One has to have a certain kind of experience that will deliver a certain kind of connection. To some extent, this is a surprising initial maneuver; it could conceivably be launched against any visitor, and the faux-Latin of the phrase suggests a universal category. Before he launches into the particularly Jewish component of the book, Halkin sketches out a general argument about travel, tourism, and authenticity. As Charles Lindholm points out in *Culture and Authenticity*, traveling and tourism offer particularly strong challenges and opportunities for authenticity. Halkin’s repudiations of American life these concerns. Visiting Israel is important but ultimately inauthentic if it doesn’t bloom into *aliyah*.

For Halkin, the terrain that lies on the obverse side of authenticity is framed by difficult but necessary truths about the shortcomings of Jewish American life, which are expressed in both a personal idiom and as a larger critique of the seams and cracks in the Diaspora project and its American variation. Halkin places inauthenticity at the core of the Diaspora condition, but goes a step farther in claiming that this is particularly egregious in an epoch of choice.

This circumstance of choice is vital for understanding the exigency of authenticity that animates and tenses the contemporary relation between Israel and American Jewry. Halkin and others intuit that the establishment of the State of Israel solved longstanding problems while creating a new one. Israel became a national home for the Jew and a plausible place to live, but it also places all those who *do not* live there under the suspicion of authenticity. This circumstance is nuanced by an awareness that the situation both is and is not unprecedented. On the one hand, Israel re-scrambles the relationship between Diaspora and homeland. On the other hand, it continues and extends this relationship, making it even more reified. As Gregory Spyro observes in his recent novel *Captivity*, “not a single member of the delegation stayed behind in Judea, but had always scurried back, helter-skelter, to despised, heathen, unclean Rome to eat the sour bread of exile.”

While the diaspora began even while the Temple was still standing, the changed conditions of contemporary sovereignty have important implications. Persuasion rather than prayer becomes the strategy to move large amount of Jews to Israel. The State of Israel shifts the paradigm from aspiration to authenticity- anyone could live there, rather than everyone saying they would like to, one day. *Not* living in Israel becomes a thoroughly inauthentic act rather than a pious loitering for the Messiah. Debates over authenticity always happen on the seams between overlapping and clashing narratives, each of which is available in authentic and inauthentic versions. It gets interesting when these various scenarios are superimposed and complete each other. For example, Halkin’s move to Israel opts him into a more authentically Jewish story while allowing him to retain his American voice and identity.

Nearly forty years after *Letters* was first published. Halkin returned to the subject of Aliyah, filtered through the life of one of Jewish history’s most extraordinary poets and

thinkers, Yehuda HaLevi. Halkin's biography of Halevi, which appeared as part of Nextbook's Jewish Encounters series, concludes with a coda that takes HaLevi's own belated crossing to Israel as a point of departure for an autobiographical turn on Halkin's part. If in Letters Halkin's interlocutor is an imagined representative American Jew, then here it is the medieval poet-rabbi.

It is no coincidence that Halkin gravitated towards HaLevi. The contour of the latter's life and the thematics of his poetry have made him the bard of pre-modern Zionism. His line "I am in the West and my heart is in the East" is still sung and celebrated as an anthem of Zionist longing and a reminder of the gap between exilic reality and redemptive yearning, grafted onto the directional vectors of the compass. HaLevi's orientation towards the East is complicated by the reality that he thrived in Andalusian Spain and Egypt. His ascent to Israel, a lifelong dream only achieved at the end of his life, was coterminous with tragedy. He seems to have died immediately upon arrival, with legend having it that a man on horseback trampled him the instant he kneeled down to kiss the sacred dirt.

While Halkin pays careful and admirable attention to HaLevi's poetic meter, his philosophical achievement, and his roiling political and cultural contexts, he is clearly most taken with the poem of HaLevi's life, whose final stanza ended in the port of Acre. This biography ends with the beginning of Halkin's literary career, his Letters. This gaze back towards the Letters, which Halkin presents as having been inspired in various ways by his encounter with HaLevi's verse, offers an occasion to narrate his own drama of Israel and authenticity. As in Letters, the journey begins in dissatisfaction: "I had never been able to take American Jewish life seriously" (285). The compound is what frustrates Halkin. He evocatively adumbrates the "romance of America" and the "romance of Jewish history," but succinctly explains, "I could imagine a life as an American in America and I could imagine a life as a Jew

in Israel, but I could never imagine life as an American Jew” (286). HaLevi’s landscapes were Southern Spain and North Africa, while Halkin ranges across the American continent, from Alabama to California to “150 acres of woods with a brook in the middle of Maine” (287). Accelerating events in both Israel and the United States in the late sixties finally precipitate Halkin’s crisis-tinctured sense of inhabiting a bifurcated identity on the verge of perforation. Out of this rupture comes the commitment to Aliyah, for Halkin and HaLevi both.

The book ends with these two figures fused closer together than ever before, as Halkin launches into a reverie of what there is no record of, a HaLevi down on his decision to ascend. “All he needs is a single spark, for the dry timber of his soul to catch fire. But the grey rocks have yielded nothing...the more intensely he scrutinizes it, the more it shrinks from him.” Here the gap between the imagined and the actual is a yawning abyss large enough to swallow the entirety of the Jewish dream. Halkin quickly swerves, and avers that his storytelling daydream of HaLevi’s disappointment is no reflection of his own Aliyah, of which he remains steadfastly certain.

### ***Ally*: A Special Relationship**

Michael Oren’s *Ally* might seem a strange interlocutor as most of its press has focused on its behind-closed-doors account of tension between the Israeli government and the Obama Administration over the peace process and the Joint Plan of Action with Iran rather than the relation between *aliyah* and authenticity that preoccupies the other authors in this chapter. However, a reading of *Ally* reveals a close linkage between Oren’s political life and his own pursuit of an authentically Jewish space and sphere of action. *Ally* is essentially a meditation on how the negotiations over *aliyah* and authenticity translate into policy and the thorny dimensions of loyalty and national interests. Oren was born in New Jersey yet went on to become Israel’s

ambassador to the United States. *Ally* is two things. It is a memoir of Oren's journey into a hybrid Israeli-American identity, and a behind-the-scenes-look at recent tensions and negotiations between the American and Israeli governments. Its chronology follows Oren's career from young soldier to academic into governmental service as Israel's ambassador to the United States.

*Ally* begins with Oren about to assume his ambassadorial duties, which necessitate renouncing his American citizenship. The shredding of that passport becomes the key moment in his own personal and political journey. For Oren, the drama of his political career derives from the tensions at play in his choice of identity and nationalities. Even his ascension to the post of Israeli Ambassador to the United States is formulated in distinctly American terms. His life at the seam of the American and Israeli elites becomes legible as a particularly late twentieth century mingling of the possibilities of Jewish life. Paradoxically, Oren maintains that *aliyah* puts him even more firmly in the fulcrum of American policy, aspirations, and ideals. However, a close reading of the tensions Oren excavates suggest that his path also generates a host of dissonances that suggest the edges of these jockeying ideals are sharper than Oren presents them in the context of his own story.

Like Gordis, Oren formulates his story as one not of disaffection with America and then found meaning in the Israeli context, but rather as a choice between two highly meaningful and attractive ways of life where the ideals of one dialogue with the aspirations of the other. Ultimately, however, Oren's synthesis is an unhappy one, for reasons more structural than contingent. His attempt to square the circle of his Jewish and American identities, played out simultaneously at the highest diplomatic level and the most intimate personal dimension. *Ally* takes the conceptual tensions present in Halkin and Gordis and concretizes them in the rough and

tumble world of realpolitik. The book's conclusion and subsequent reception suggest that turbulence lies ahead.

Oren's Foreword to *Ally* explicitly binds the personal to the political. His own relationship to both the United States and Israel is both metonymic and revealing. "This is the story of that alliance," Oren explains, "as experienced by one who treasures his American identity while proudly serving the State of Israel" (xiii). The term "Ally" allows Oren to continually evoke and simultaneously represent these two countries. His own allegiances allow him to be the site of this alliance, which in turn depends on the geo-political twinning of the two countries. While Oren's position as Israel's ambassador to the United States requires him to clearly speak for a set of interests and unambiguously put himself in the service of a particular polity, he understands his own narrative to be a thoroughly blended one- "It is a quintessentially American story of a young person who refused to relinquish a dream irrespective of the obstacles, and an inherently Israeli story about assuming onerous responsibilities" (xiv). This sentence might serve as a legend for Oren's self-understanding and particular blending of Israeli and American tones. The use of "inherent" and "quintessential" telegraph that Oren will not cede any ground in being authentically both, but also that melding the two does not compromise but rather augments each identity singularly. The two stories, bundled together with the alliance of the "and," augment rather than antagonize.

The seamlessness of this presentation belies the presence of radiating hairline fractures. Oren acknowledges "alongside their immemorial ties, the U.S.-Israel relationship includes bitter differences...America and Israel are allies in the most meaningful sense, yet their alliance is scored with divides." These divides threaten to bisect Oren's hybrid Israeli-American self, and are most threatening when these differences coalesce to threaten Oren's conviction of a

synthesized authenticity. Oren's account is a steady parade of misunderstandings and missed signals between the Israeli and American governments. This analysis will read those back into Oren's own *bildungsroman* of ambassadorship and authentically American Israeli ambassador to the United States.

The possibility that the cloth of identity Oren weaves and the flags he flies might suffer from the possibility of fraying is apparent in Oren's first chapter, "The Perforated Passport." The tearing to come is prepared by a cloudless sky of his American upbringing. "My affection for America sprang naturally," Oren reflects, "I played Little League baseball, attended pep rallies, and danced- in a lamentable banana tux- at my senior prom" (3). These memories are in turn compressed into the well-worn pages of Oren's American passport. As the hole puncher closes on this document, rendering it null and void upon his assumption of ambassadorial duties for Israel. It is at this moment that Oren first articulates the push and pull between Israel and the United States that also occupied Halkin and Gordis. Whereas Halkin's polemic angles him away from the United States, both Gordis and Oren see only pulls. Contrasting his own defaced passport with those burned during the anti-Vietnam protests of the late 1960's, Oren avers "renouncing my American citizenship was not an act of protest. It reflected, rather, a love for another land- not that of my father, but of my forefathers" (6). Oren's formulation is clever, but it draws a distinction we have seen elsewhere, noticeably in the debate between Henry and Nathan Zuckerman in *The Counterlife*. Immediate family history jostles with more distant yet ancestral and commanding claims that are outside immediate personal history yet claim a larger authenticity. The voices of the forefathers carry an implicit critique, however. "Being Jewish in America, while culturally and materially comfortable felt to me like living in the margins. The major chapter was being written right now, and not in New Jersey" (8). The writing metaphor



here is extended and does important work in bolstering Oren's negotiation of authenticity. Living as if one is the character in a novel paradoxically makes one more authentic, closer to the plot and the action.

This zone that Oren sees as the sweet spot of authenticity is both wholly Israeli and insistently blended. Oren is "no longer a stranger in my own land," he merges with "my ancestors' topography and conversed in their language" (11). This yearning for complete Israeliness is always balanced in Oren's self-understanding with a gesture towards his American identity. "Quite naturally," he reflects, "I stood and sang "The Star-Spangled-Banner" and, in the next breath, Israel's national anthem" (11). Oren consistently thinks of himself as both ambassador and dual-citizen. Oren is especially attuned to the moments where these two spheres of his life achieve tangency, like when "I acquired my first U.S. passport and boarded a plane for Israel" (8). While these moments rhyme Oren's deepest commitments, he also moves more proactively to achieve this particularly hybrid identity. "

From then on, I would carry two passports, both of them blue, one American and the other Israeli. I also Hebraicized my name to Oren, meaning pine tree, which recalled my American roots but also my regeneration in our ancestral land. Those two identities finally felt melded in me (13)

There are a couple of telling moves here that open up onto the broader space of authenticity Oren seeks to occupy here and throughout this memoir. The passport, a document that attest to citizenship while also allowing for travel throughout the world, remains an important symbol for the hybrid-citizen Oren is trying to become. He holds both, but they share a color that complements rather than clashes. Of course, Oren will have to relinquish one of these passports when he becomes ambassador to Israel, as and/both becomes either/or, and Oren must find other

talismans of continuity. More dramatic is Oren's name change, which both nods to an important 'Israelizing' gesture and gives it his own American spin.

Names often have an intimate and vexed relationship to immigration. The story of the name quickly and irrevocably altered at Ellis Island has entered American folklore as shorthand for the loss as well gain that accrued to those who sought a new life here. It worked somewhat differently in Israel, where name changes were meant to confirm new identities as new Jews in a new place. Taking a Hebrew or especially a Biblical name was a way of retrofitting a persona to seamlessly fit into the kind of citizen Zionism required and sought to manufacture.

Oren's shift in nomenclature participates in both of these symbolic shifts. He Hebraicizes his name in almost classic fashion, but catches an allusion to distinctly American fauna even as he uproots himself and commits to new soil. This commitment leads Oren to start thinking more systematically about the symbiosis between Israel and American Jewry. His career as a lecturer and academic takes him to American universities, where he develops the idea that "in America, the problem is a scarcity of Jewish identity, while in Israel, the problem is a superabundance. I, for one, would rather deal with a superabundance" (26). While we have seen something like this analysis in both Gordis and Halkin to explain their relocation to a zone of saturated and thick Jewishness, Oren's shift creates a different take on authenticity because it is both more full throated in its commitment to a grafted Israeliness (Oren moves at a younger age than either Halkin or Gordis) as well as much more elaborate in his ongoing relationship to the United States, both in his ongoing work with the IDF as a spokesperson to foreign media and his academic career.

It is a crucial development that Oren's professional breakthrough comes with the publication of *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (OUP,

2002). Still the definitive historical work on the subject, Oren describes how he was able to “relive from the inside the saga that, as a kid, I could only watch on TV” (32). Academic and archival work allows Oren to redefine his relationship to these dramatic events in a more authentic direction, “from the inside,” while also affording him distinctly American markers of success; “overnight, I became a commentator on news programs, a frequent op-ed contributor, and a guest on *The Daily Show* and *Charlie Rose*. The lecturer once snubbed by academia now a visiting professor at Harvard and Yale” (33). The feedback loop between Israel and America is made even more complex by Oren’s attribution of the success of the book to the proximity of its publication to 9/11. “The viscous clouds raised by the towers’ destruction,” Oren speculates, “might have obscured the events that occurred in the Middle East in 1967, but in fact highlighted their relevance. About to embark on Middle Eastern wars, Americans were ravenous for background” (33). This work of academic ambassadorship is prelude to the diplomatic variety of the same work, which inaugurates a different phase in Oren’s story.

In some sense, it constitutes a second *aliyah* in that it resets his relationship with both Israel and the United States that also weaves in elements of *yeridah*, intensifying his relationship with the United States and forcing his relocation to Washington DC . Oren becomes not only Israeli, but synonymous with Israeli policy and representative of the Israeli government. At the same time, his efficacy depends on his proximity to the pulse of American thinking. Explaining why he was tapped for the position, Oren explains “Netanyahu, it turned out, had read my book *Power, Faith, and Fantasy* and was impressed by my knowledge of American history in the Middle East...I also felt that Netanyahu intuited the need for someone with a wide perspective on the United States...above all, the prime minister wanted to hear my analysis of contemporary America and its future with Israel” (57). These reflections come close to the nub of the

particular spin Oren gives to his appointment. He's chosen by virtue of his American origin, not despite it. It is not only in himself that Oren sees the advantage of this cross-cultural fluency; his boss has it as well. "In his unaccented American English, Prime Minister Netanyahu congratulated me" (59).

There are a couple of reasons why Oren works to conflate American and Israeli language and sensibility- one personal, and the other political, two categories which themselves intertwine to form the thrust of the book's drama and also its polemic. Oren's own journey depends on Israeliness and Americanness seamlessly speaking to each other in mutually reinforcing tones, but there is also a larger geo-political synergy Oren wants to urge and embody, an alliance that "will remain vital for both Americans and Israelis, and beneficial to the stability of the world" (xiv). This early work of harmonizing also serves a dramatic purpose of setting up the conflict to come between the Netanyahu and Obama governments. At the same time, it suggests that these tensions and divergences are deviations from the norm rather than a natural set of affairs. The discord that Oren bears witness to is thus set against a melding that Oren has instantiated from the very beginning.

Crises have a funny relation to authenticity- they can threaten it, but they are also the occasions where authenticity can be challenged and thereby confirmed. For Oren but not only for Oren a critical quality of authenticity is durability. Something that is authentic is real and thus will last. In this formulation, authenticity's opposite is not the inauthentic but the ephemeral or the transient. In Oren's work, it is the American-Israeli relationship that is subjected to this litmus test, and indeed in popular discourse words like 'perpetual,' 'enduring,' and 'eternal' often arise in relation to this relationship, as if to push it away from the realm of the expedient and towards the authentic. This is achieved by quick recourse to the language of values rather

than *realpolitik*, even though the latter is often what is most contentious and at stake. For example, Oren addresses his embassy staff on the first day of his appointment thusly, “The values I acquired as an American- the love of liberty, a dedication to equal rights...were integral to my decision to move to Israel. My loyalties to the United States and the Jewish State are mutually validating..” He goes on to distill his mission as the task of “representing my homeland to the home of my birth” (69). While we have seen some of these themes before, this passage even more insistently pursues this linkage between Israel and the United States via the vehicle of internal rhyme- “States and State, “home” and homeland” both reinforce and complete each other, conveying not only complementarity but also a kind of double knot. As he puts it at the end of *Ally*, “Their bonds are elemental, meaningful, and mutually, enduringly beneficial” (377).

Even as these ties are continually re-inscribed, Oren is consistently aware of discrepancies, or as he terms them, “asymmetries.” Often, they are superficial or aesthetic, but are almost always read as metonymous to larger cultural differences. Oren performs this operation on both the stylistic difference between official portraits of Israeli and American leaders (the former look stern, the latter jovial) and the varying nature of the respective embassies of the two countries. “In contrast to America’s fortress-like embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel’s counterpart in Northwest Washington at least makes an aesthetic effort” (71). These reflections on difference are iterated further in Oren’s observation about personality divergences between Americans and Israelis that pepper his recollections of his time in office and often are proffered as explanation of miscommunication between the two governments. In these instances, Oren seems to allow for a wide berth for differences between the two countries, perhaps as a way of highlighting the need for an ambassadorial bridge to link Israel and the United States.

While the work Oren does to synthesize and blend his Israeli and American commitments into a seamlessly authentic whole prepares him for the work to be that bridge, *Ally* quickly moves to delineate the pressuring vectors that threaten the tensile strength of Oren's Israeli-American project. The first of these challenges derives from the way authenticity can backfire as soon as it is invoked. Oren sees this potential as especially potent when it comes to the assimilative possibilities of *aliyah*. It is worth quoting this realization at length, because it both complicates the premise of *Ally* while also redoubling Oren's efforts to use his *aliyah* to the benefit of both countries.

While I was no longer legally bound to the United States, I remained in Israeli eyes an *Amerikai*. This, too, was an impediment...naïfs on Israeli TV frequently sound American. That accent still tinged my Hebrew. Americans who make *aliyah*, moreover, can be disdained by those Israelis who, though die-hard Zionists, question why anyone sane would exchange cushy America for the hardscrabble Middle East. Surely, if you gave up living in a big Long Island house with a lawn and a two-car garage for squeezing into a similarly priced three-room apartment lacking a space for your thirdhand car but fully equipped with a bomb shelter, you had to be strange, some Israelis reasoned. The inflections in my speech and my decision to move to Israel remained impediments- however subliminal- to earning the embassy's respects. (75)

There is a lot to unpack here, and it is a succinct statement that serves as a counter-note to the more optimistic paeans to the transition into authentic Israeliness that often mark these memoirs. Oren encounters two challenges, which can be termed linguistic and lifestyle. While accent and fluency are perennial quandaries of the immigrant experience, Oren suggests that there is something particularly loaded about the American effort to speak Hebrew, perhaps due to an anxiety of influence where Israelis defined themselves authentically away from the overwhelming presence of English and American culture. While many in Israel's founding generation spoke with marked accents that marked their Eastern European origins (Ben-Gurion's reading of the Declaration of Independence, for example, is heavily inflected), the creation of a

distinctly Israeli patois came to be both a means of defining Israeliness and a way of inducting newcomers into this new skein of belonging.

The second arena of conflict that Oren introduces is not linguistic but socio-economic. The American dream, Long Island-based and featuring a large home, compels befuddlement on the part of Israelis who struggle to get by in conditions that are buffeted by tighter economic realities on the one hand and looming security threats on the other. Here the language of authenticity is rhetorically shoved aside in favor of a stark comparison in lifestyle and the possibilities of material success. Oren's choice to move to Israel, from this angle, makes him not a hero of authenticity but a *friar*, the Hebrew term and cultural category for a sucker, someone foolish enough to be taken advantage of.

While Oren is forced to navigate this tension from Israelis within his embassy, his journey towards an authentically allied personality and Israel-United States relationship faces a more serious threat from the internal tensions that bedevil the American Jew committed to Israel. One of the flash points for these internal schisms is the Jonathan Pollard affair. Jonathan Pollard was an Israeli spy who was caught and convicted for committing espionage against the United States. In many ways, this was the nightmare scenario for American Jews, a moment where the two countries clashed rather than collaborated. Pollard's continued imprisonment remained a source of tension between the United States and Israel as well as an ongoing point of tension within American Jews. As Oren notes, "For me, as an Israeli and as a Jew raised in America, the Pollard issue aroused potent emotions" (165). This is not an inherently unusually response, but Oren's position as ambassador complicates and projects this discomfiture, and requires of him to be a particular kind of translator- "I further described to Israelis the dissonance between the American and Israeli perceptions of Pollard. The person whom Israel viewed as a hero was, for

the United States, a traitor” (167). Oren’s canvas is the game of geo-politics and diplomacy, the secure lines and closed conference rooms where the Israeli-American alliance is consummated and iterated. His view, from the inside and behind the curtain, finds a counterpoint in Eshkol Nevo’s tracks from the periphery.

***Neuland: Tiyl to the Promised Land in the Pampas***

Eshkol Nevo’s *Neuland*, published in Hebrew in 2011 and translated into English just this year, brings together a diverse array of narrative arcs, all of which center on the idea of travel. It’s a book about journeys, comings and goings. The six hundred page novel offers a study of people in motion, and posits that travel lies somewhere close to the center of Israeli identity. The two central trajectories run alongside archetypal ones in the Jewish imagination; *aliyah* and *yeridah*, the vertically conceived vectors of ‘ascent’ and ‘descent’ to the Land of Israel. *Neuland* works these tropes by enacting a series of departures and arrivals to Israel, but its circulatory rhythms are more baroque and crisscross into a lattice-like itinerary that suggests a more complex 21<sup>st</sup> century take on the way people move, and the shaping influence of history on the one hand and personal searches for meaning on the other. Two large-scale historical happenings, the first being the desperate exodus precipitated by the catastrophe of the Holocaust in Europe and the second being the corresponding immigration to Israel inflect the latter. These broadly arcing, historically inscribed routes are counterpoised with mobile, seeking Israelis, one looking for his father and the other trying to escape the tragic death of her brother.

*Neuland* is interesting because it both pays ample imaginative attention to the demographic, intellectual, and spiritual trip from Europe to Israel that lies at the core of the Israeli foundation narrative while also layering on top an extended account of the tourism and road-tripping that has become an essential component of contemporary Israeli culture. According



to ISSTA, Israel's largest travel agency, thirty percent of the 30,000-40,000 Israeli backpackers who travel annually head to South America. Seventy percent of these are between the ages of twenty and twenty-four, fresh out of their mandatory army service. As a profile on this trend in *Forbes* magazine suggested, "for many Israelis, a backpacking trip after their mandatory military service is as much a rite of passage as the two or three years they spend in the army." Chaim Noy, a professor at the University of South Florida who studies Israeli backpacking, links the extent of the practice to the traumas that are often attendant on military service. Additionally, the inaccessibility of Israel's closest neighbors to travel pushes Israelis on far-flung trips to distant locales. Crucially, Nevo's two backpacking protagonists, Inbar and Dori, do not fit comfortably in this demographic cohort; they are older, and their journeys are propelled and accompanied by loss. But still, they traverse what is commonly called 'The Hummus Trail,' and along the way find both themselves and gaggles of Israeli fellow travelers.

*Neuland* is not only an imaginative contribution to the abiding importance of travel in the Israeli psyche. It also shows a sustained conceptual interest in what might be termed the 'Zionist Counter-Factual,' the possibility present from the very beginning of the movement's modern incarnation that perhaps Zion was not the sine qua non of reconstituted Jewish autonomy. Famously, Herzl's proposition that the First Zionist Congress of 1897 consider the Crown's proposal for a Jewish homeland in Africa as an intermediate step to getting to Palestine divided the delegates and nearly caused a rift in the nascent movement. These alternatives- Uganda, Argentina, the Soviet territory of Birobijan, Michael Chabon's Alaska from *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*- have aged out of possibility and into a kind of ghostly afterlife that serves as both punch line and shorthand for a sense that the painful complications of the specific place that became the State of Israel might have been somehow evaded.

The status of the counter-factual and its relation to history in a Zionist context is not only limited to plans that were scrapped or initiatives that never got off the ground. It is implicated in the quality of the ambition to devise an alternative to an increasing desperate state of affairs in Europe, in the desire to ‘normalize’ a political situation that was seen as unnatural and precarious. Most dramatically, its attempt to redefine the Jews as a political entity along nationalist lines ran counter to other, more dominant strains of Jewish self-conception. The continuum between fact and ‘counter-fact’ is embedded in a Herzlian phrase that came to be the great rallying cry of Zionism- ‘Im Tirtzu, Ain Zu Aggadah,’ colloquially translated as ‘If you will it, it is no dream.’ The line between fact and counter-fact is a border that can be adjusted, with effort.

‘Neuland,’ the novels grandest invention, is Manny’s attempt to create a new alternative between Israel as a homeland and an un-Hebrew diaspora. He does this by building a place almost exclusively populated by Israelis, a society that partakes deeply of Israeli cultural codes, slang, and rituals of organization while also using the geographic distance from what they call ‘the source’ to revise and renovate those very practices. It’s a hypothetical that both dusts off discarded schemes from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century while also building on the creation of the quirks of seventy years of Israeli state building. As Inbar explains, “the warm, direct way Israelis relate to one another is our greatest achievement, greater than the drying out of the swamps, greater than the technology industry” (447). This is preserved in Neuland, even as Manny winds back the clock on so much else from the past seven decades.

Neuland is a halfway space between a utopian other-history and a modest gloss on the present. As Inbar muses, “I wonder what would’ve happened if we’d taken the Argentinian road, the road untaken...imagine if the Jewish state were in South America. The big trip after the

Army would be to Eretz Yisrael” (350). Inbar’s thought experiment retains the twin notions of a ‘Jewish State’ and ‘Eretz Yisrael,’ the modern experiment in sovereignty and the ancient idea of a sacred land. What is decoupled, of course, is the necessity that they be inextricable. If Roth plays with the idea that ‘Fortress Israel’ is the new Diaspora, Nevo entertains the possibility that it is the new Bangkok, a travel destination rather than the place to go home to.

A brief overview of the book’s plot can reveal its governing structure as a multi-layered set of itineraries. The central incident is the disappearance of Dori’s father, a noted war hero and industrialist. Partly to find his father and partly to get some distance from his rocky marriage, Dori hires a local guide, Alfredo, and goes to find his father in the forests and plains of South America. Along the way, he meets a fellow backpacker, Inbar, who is making her way through the same territory to sort out her continuing grief over her brother’s death in an army training accident as well as gain some separation from a difficult relation with her mother. Inbar meets Dori by happenstance in South America, and joins his search to find his father.

To make a long trip more expedited and to skip to the section of the book most germane to our concerns, Dori’s father, impelled by his wife’s death and lingering and unresolved wounds from his service in the Yom Kippur War, has disappeared into the backwoods of South America in order to found a commune at the former site of an attempted Jewish colony from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is a counterfactual space, a relic of a community where the idea of Jewish autonomy and agrarian self-sufficiency was attempted outside of Israel, but which Dori’s father remakes as a kind of retreat and rehabilitation center for Israelis traumatized by their military experience. He calls this experiment *Neuland*, a gesture towards Herzl’s seminal tract *Altneuland*, in which the Viennese journalist envisioned the creation of a new country in an old land. As Dori explains, “Baron Hirsch bought a lot of land there because he thought it was the

best place to establish a national home for the Jews...Herzl himself considered two territories for his vision of the Jewish state; Palestine and Argentina” (349). The return to Herzl as the defining architect of the plan for Jewish statehood is in some sense a claim to reanimation of the founding father of the movement, but is another direction dimension an attempt to simply leap over the subsequent history of the state, to start anew by going back to the beginning.

Yet Neuland comes at the end of the book, rather than at its outset. It necessitates its own process of *aliyah*, and offers its own peculiar promise of rescue and refuge. Unlike the largely terrestrial and maritime approaches to Israel enshrined in such incidents as Yehuda HaLevi’s voyage from Alexandria and the dramatic arrival of immigrants from Ethiopia via commercial airliners, or ‘on the wings of eagles,’ it has to be arrived at on foot. More locally, the mechanics of moving around on foot and in a car differ drastically from the sense of moving on a boat, discrepancies that play a role in the romantic developments that structure both Inbar and Lily’s journeys.

Nevo draws from several Israeli categories to create a kind of anthology of travel. In addition to the backpacking genre mentioned above Nevo also explores the notion of the *tiyul*, or hike, a domestic form of backpacking and day tripping with the ostensible purpose of inculcating a sense of intimacy with the geographical features of the Land of Israel. Nevo melds these two categories by creating a plot that partakes of both the backpacking trip and the *tiyul*, but revises both by setting the backpacking trip on a course *towards* an alternative Jewish state and taking the *tiyul* outside the boundaries of Israel. These two frameworks of travel are linked up to the broader and more consequential re-thinking of *aliyah*. Nevo thus works over both travel and destination to generate a familiar-yet distinctly altered itinerary.

The work's translation into English for an international audience is especially interesting, as it is a text that entirely excludes the United States from the wandering of its characters, and that is spoken only in Hebrew and Spanish. In fact, it almost presents a vision of a possible Jewish world without the American diaspora, imagining a re-drawn Jewish map oriented around Israel and South America, the latter of which serves as a scene of both wandering and the satellite Jewish community of Neuland. The circuit that Nevo imagines pointedly evades the United States primarily because it imagines a different kind of communal arrangement, one that both challenges Israel's supremacy by revising and replicating it elsewhere and also is careful to encase that challenge within an Israeli diaspora, and is careful to insist that even (or especially) Neuland is only coherent in relation to 'the source country;' it exists to rectify the problems generated by Israel just as Israel was an earlier generation's response to the questions of the Diaspora. The United States as an alternative solution to the same dilemma does not quite fit the syllogistic reasoning that leads Manny Peleg to build Neuland.

It is not only the book's territorial focus that excludes the United States. Its linguistic circumference likewise marginalizes American Jewry. Nevo plays with the frictions that arise when a cohort of Hebrew-speaking Israelis move through a Spanish speaking population, mostly played to comic effect by the disparate levels of fluency between Dori and Inbar. At the same time, the English reader is struck by the absence of English, the native tongue of half of world Jewry, and the lingua franca of much of the world. Hebrew and Spanish; one language large, the other small, but both bear a peculiar relationship to both 'American' and 'Jewish.' Hebrew, the ancestral language they do not speak, and Spanish, increasingly English's rival as a national language. By imagining the radial expansion of Hebrew, Nevo reverses the usual dynamic whereby Diaspora communities learn the language in order to more effectively relate to Israel.

Here, where the idea of *yeridah*, or permanent relocation from Israel is flirted with as a live option (many of the backpackers Dori and Inbar encounter have no plans to return to Israel), the dissemination of not just Jewish culture but specifically *Israeli* culture becomes a live possibility.

If the circuit of wandering is in some senses larger than the precincts of the American Diaspora, it is also more tightly wound around the specific events and psychological currents that comprise the Israeli psyche. In a journal entry written by his father that Dori finds in a remote town Manny vents “there are so many Israeli kids on this continent so many kids with shrapnel in their bodies...our young people they travel for no reason run away escape” (352). The home become hospital and trauma center; Menny sees in this development not only the general tragic ironies of history, but more specifically the failure of his generation of leaders and heroes, people who defended the State but who could not quite make it whole. A complex series of intuitions leads Menny to understand that rehabilitation can only happen at a distance, by poaching the maneuvers and strategies of Zionist pioneering and extracting them from the State.

***The Best Place on Earth: At Home on the Periphery***

Leaving Israel is the subject of the title story from Ayelet Tsabari’s new short-story collection *The Best Place on Earth*. The entire volume is an important one for several reasons. Recently named the winner of the 2015 Sami Rohr Prize, it stakes out new and important fictional terrain. Tsabari’s stories are crowded with people who previously had not make it into the pages of Israeli fiction. These include the Filipino caretakers who have become a staple of Israeli life and the Yemeni, Ethiopian, and Iraqi diasporas who uneasily abide in the Jewish State. Tsabari, herself an Israeli of Yemenite descent who has settled in Canada, is an especially effective chronicler of those at the margins and on the periphery; the title story takes place in a small and peaceful town in rural Canada, but is everywhere a meditation on Israel.

There is a certain kind of nation building happening in these stories, but of a very different kind, more interested in expanding the circumference of who gets into fiction rather than meditating on the first principles of the State. Of course, the two are entangled in all kinds of ways, and Tsabari's work is a cogent and powerful argument for a wider and more unfamiliar Israel than the one that habitually finds its way into novels, even today. Tsabari's stories relentlessly pursue the various ways of being far from the center of the grain in contemporary Israeli society. Largely, these fall into three primary categories, each of which can be linked back to an unresolved strand within Zionist thinking and statesmanship that continues to manifest in the policies and culture of the State as tensions of ideology, practical governance, and social formation.

First among these is the long-running drama of the status of Mizrahi Jews in the fabric of the State. To briefly sketch the historical background, the arrival in the years immediately following 1948 of hundreds of thousands of Jews from Arab and North African lands, and then the subsequent airlift of Ethiopian refugees in the 1970's and 1980's both confirmed and challenged central premises. The resonance of the 'ingathering of the exiles' pulled on the heart-strings of Jews everywhere; there was a widespread sense that this was a deep and powerful historical event. These ancient communities, intact since the days of the last sovereign Jewish polity, had at last found their way back. The reality that nearly every one of these communities, from Iraq and Yemen to Libya and Syria was directly threatened only added to the sense of drama.

There is both poignancy and salience in Tsabari's status as a writer born in Israel and yet educated, trained, and currently residing in Canada. In addition to writing from a North American context and for an English speaking audience, she joins a growing and impressive list

of native-born Israeli writers who live outside Israel and yet continue to center their fiction in that place. To some extent, this is a continuation of a macro-trend in Israeli fiction, with the detaching of literary production from nationalist concerns and implication in the broader state of the Zionist project or Israeli state. At the same time, however, writers like Tsabari remain powerfully engaged with the most pressing concerns of Israeli society; distance dilates rather than detracts. In a recent review in *Tablet Magazine*, Adam Kirsch notes, “to read Tsabari is to see Israeliness, which was intended as a remedy for the ills of Diasporic Jewishness, turn into a new kind of Diasporic identity.” Tsabari’s interest in the peripheral and far reaches of Israeliness borrows something from the marginality of the Diaspora, never as much as when Israelis are interposed *into* diasporic geography.

The larger phenomenon of *yeridah* is the necessary backdrop to *The Best Place on Earth*, and the context that gives the title its salient irony. What Tsabari’s story describes via anecdote and the paint and easel of the fiction writer’s toolkit has also been described as a larger sociological phenomenon, one that occupies an uneasy place in a global Jewish discourse where Israel is at least nominally perceived as destination rather than point of departure.

Perhaps the most thorough study of this population is Moshe Shokeid’s *Children of Circumstances: Israeli Emigrants in New York*. Shokeid highlights the complexity of those Israelis who choose to live outside of Israel. As Shokeid explains,

The Israeli case illuminates the individual’s struggle to reconcile the contradictions between the pressing commitments to a national history, a society, and a revolution and the striving for immediate personal rewards. These conflicts... prompt some individuals to opt for the Land of Promise over the Promised Land (x).

While there are other ways to frame this migration, Shokeid chooses to emphasize the process of emigrating from Israel to America as a reckoning of the tension between devotion to a larger



cause and the pursuit of an environment less over-determined and therefore more amenable to a certain brand of individual success. This framework points to a larger irony that gives *yeridah* its ideological piquancy. As Shokeid observes,

In the span of one generation I thus witnessed, first, the massive flow into Israel of Jews from all corners of the world wishing to participate in the renewal of Jewish independent nationhood, and then a turnabout, when many participants in this revolution took the boats and planes leading back to the Diaspora (xi).

The Israeli who leaves Israel does so with the complicating knowledge that she is leaving a place defined by its status as a destination, and emigrating from a place built on the ideological underpinnings of immigration. The permanence of their presence outside of Israel is a reversing of the project of ‘Gathering In of the Exiles,’ a reverse commuting along the highway of history. At the same time, however, Israelis abroad serve as agents for a globalized Israeli culture, detectable in business, cuisine, and familial ties that link Israel to a wide range of places far from Tel Aviv.

The Israeli living outside of Israel pursues their own path, but in doing so also challenges a certain species of Israeli mythology, a dynamic Roth animates and skewers to great comic effect in *Operation Shylock*. However, as Shokeid illustrates, this smudging of the line between Israel and the Diaspora by the presence of Israelis outside of Israel is liable to pushback not only from Israelis invested in the preeminence of the Zionist project but also by American Jews likewise invested in resisting the reality imposed by the presence of Israelis outside of Israel. “American Jews have donated money and supported the establishment of a state in order for the Israelis to be there. The presence of *yordim* in the United States is the antithetical to the principle of Israel for Israelis.” *Yordim*, then, find themselves in a fraught relationship to both the Israeli State they left behind and the American Jews who would constitute a kind of natural surrogate

community. Tsabari's story, however, transposes these tensions into the intimate space of the family and one sister's choice to leave Israel.

*The Best Place on Earth*, provides a sustained look at the vexed questions of identity activated by Israel's claims and limitations. Many of the stories in the collection take place at the kitty corners of Israeli society, the geographic, social, and ethnic peripheries. This final story, however, dilates this understanding of periphery to an international extent, in the process investigating some of the same sensitive questions Eshkol Nevo undertakes in *Neuland*. Like that book, Tsabari's story angles slightly away from the United States in order to do so. While his tacked South to Latin America, she is drawn North to Canada to illustrate the seams in Jewish and Israeli families, and selves.

"The Best Place on Earth" begins with a moment that highlights the tension between Israel and Diaspora, and punches it home with an aeronautical image that doubles as a sociological pun. "The plane started its descent," a direct allusion to *yeridah*, the vertical language used to describe leaving Israel, "and Naomi looked out the window at the dramatic patchwork of land and water. Vancouver was as blue as Jerusalem was golden" (207). The allusion to Naomi Shemer's famous "Jerusalem of Gold" encases Israel in a shimmering and romantic envelope even as it recedes into the horizon at 37,000 feet. Another Naomi is the protagonist of this story, and she initiates the trip to Vancouver to spend time with her sister after Naomi's husband had an affair. The two sisters grew up in Jerusalem, a setting Tsabari evocatively evokes; "they had grown up running in the narrow streets of Shaarei Tsedek, spent afternoons riding their bikes in the Machane Yehuda Market, pinching cashews and peanuts from the Armenian vendor on the corner of Yafo Street" (210). Childhood memory finds its geographic translation in the byways of the Old City, its iconic neighborhoods.

These details add up to a larger comparison that sets the stage for the animating tension of the story- two sisters, and two cities. “Beautiful British Columbia. The Best Place on Earth.” She scoffed quietly. According to whom? She was from Jerusalem, after all...she had hardly ever left Jerusalem herself. She didn’t even like going to Tel Aviv” (211). Naomi’s personal and intimate memories of Jerusalem are merged with its more public persona as Holy City and international destination. To her staunchly Israeli eyes, Vancouver is perilously short on history, of both the short and long type.

Tamar, Naomi’s sister and newly minted Canadian, understands the push and pull of Israel and Canada quite differently. “When she first arrived in Canada,” Tamar reflects,

she hadn’t planned on staying long; it was just another stop, like the year spent selling sandwiches for office buildings in New York City, the months spent driving an ice cream truck in California. But in BC she noticed herself slowing down, unwinding, as if she’d been holding her breath for twenty-four years and could finally let it out. (213)

If Naomi is ensnared by Jerusalem to the extent that she can’t extricate herself from its cramped precincts, Tamar experiences her roots in Israel as propulsive rather than restraining; her home pushes her to become a vagabond, and initiates a series of itinerant experiences that are divided into year-long installments tied to the coastal United States. British Columbia, on the other hand, is a respite for the ills that Tamar implicitly felt as the product of her Israeli upbringing, wound up and fast-paced.

The winding up of the tension in the story is achieved via the exposition of this tension; Naomi cannot imagine leaving Israel, and Tamar cannot imagine staying. Arriving at her sister’s house on Hornby Island, outside of Vancouver, Naomi notices “there was nothing Jewish or Israeli about it, no mezuzahs on the door frames, no hamsas like the ones their mother had hung...no calendar with Jewish holidays marked upon it” (214). Naomi’s litany of the omitted

says much about how she understands Jewish and Israeli culture, two categories she casually conflates. Even while declaring herself inextricable from Jerusalem, she seems to allow for a certain portability of culture and affinity, whether through the presence of ritual or religious objects or by staying attuned to the rhythms of the Jewish calendar. To Tamar, the eschewal of both of these options signals a deeper, double betrayal of both homeland and hybrid Jewish/Israeli culture. In the breach created by their absence they speak to a discarded observance and dislocated sense of home.

While the story is compact, Tsabari allows for an abbreviated window into Tamar's growing distance from Israel, most poignantly expressed in a flashback to her last visit to Israel. She recalls, "she had missed Jerusalem so much when she was in Canada, but having finally made it there, she couldn't wait to go back to BC. For the first time, she saw the city through a foreigner's eyes...she no longer belonged" (218). This experience of distance from one's home country is common enough, but it does set up a taut conflict between two kinds of authenticity. On the one hand, Tamar's family is "one of the oldest in the city (Jerusalem), having arrived in the sixteenth century, after the expulsion of Jews from Spain" (212). In a country of immigrants and a city of tourists and pilgrims, such well-inscribed ancestry goes a long way towards conveying prestige and belonging. There is even a word for it in Hebrew- *Yerushalmi* refers to a deeply rooted Jerusalem family. At the same time, however, Tamar evolves away from this intimacy. Her eyes see differently, and leaving makes going back an uncomfortable experience.

This oscillation between being near and far, and the attendant swings and reversals of identity and belonging that ensue, are felt by both sisters. While for Tamar her proximity to the wooded quiet of her Canadian home amplifies her distance from Israel, Naomi undergoes a more complex meditation on nearness and farness during her stay with Tamar, one that touches on a

crucial feature of the contemporary expatriate experience, the consumption of news through the Internet. Tamar had “stopped reading news from Israel years ago,” a function of both her changed circumstances and what she sees as unrelenting bad news. Naomi, there for a shorter period of time, can’t help but check the news, and the staccato way with which this action is narrated reflects both the experience of consuming news as a web page loads as well as how the Internet can generate feelings of both disembodiment and intense viscosity

Naomi turned on the computer, typing in Ynet’s URL. A pigua <terrorist attack> in Jerusalem. Her heart stopped. She scrolled down with shaky hands, skimming over the first few lines. Then she noticed the date. The attack had taken place yesterday (220).

The cyber reality of the news that jumps off the screen complicates the governing binary between British Columbia and Israel by suggesting the possibility of another zone of interface. Like the *hamsa* on the door, Ynet (a popular Israeli news source) has the almost magical ability to dilate or telescope connection to Israel, disassociating authenticity from physical proximity. Even while it extends Israel’s news across the world, Ynet collapses distance and delivers an immediacy that causes Naomi to reflect “she loved and hated Jerusalem: a city that would forever be contested, forever divided, never at peace” (221).

“The Best Place on Earth” ends with one reconciliation, as Tamar and Naomi heal wounds and gestures towards another, as Tamar guides her sister towards working to renovate Naomi’s marriage. It is not immediately clear how these interpersonal reconciliations speak to the wider and most salient divide in the story, that between Israel and British Columbia, Vancouver and Jerusalem. Perhaps a clue can be found in the story’s title, which is repeated periodically throughout, and carries a fair amount of ambiguous meaning. “The best place on Earth” is both specific (‘place’) and global (‘Earth’). It mixes juvenile boasting with a hard

edged claim about precedence and priority. While it seems absolute and non-negotiable, it is also deeply relative and perspectival- we might each have our own favorite place, and think that is in fact the best of all possible places.

While the divide between Israel and the Diaspora as well as family tensions are among the oldest of themes, these two subjects overlap and draw emotional and affective charge from a tectonic underlay of authenticity. Tamar and Naomi's shared background is a control against which Tsabari sets the variable of *yeridah* and familial rift. Canada is set as the *non-Israel*, distant geographically, meteorologically, and in its sensibility. The portability and durability of Israeliness in this far space is Tsabari's subject, and the two sisters offer dueling approaches. For Naomi, authenticity is felt most acutely at a distance. To be authentically Israeli is to carry the culture and the country on one's back, affixing it to one's doorposts and one's computer homepage. Authenticity to self merges with connection to Israel. The best place on earth is also the truest version of the self.

Tamar presents an alternative and more subversive take on the relation between Israel and authenticity. For her, Israel's claustrophobic claims to her past, present, and future seem distinctly *inauthentic*, and it is only in distance that she can hear and reclaim the "still, small voice" that speaks to her own sense of self and belonging. While Naomi sees the authentic self as accommodated and arrayed within a web of commitments manifested as talismans of Jewish culture and investment in Israeli news, Tamar's authenticity is stripped down and far away, found in the absence of community rather than its overabundance.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter traced a robust selection of texts across a wide range of genres that trace the powerfully freighted stakes of 'ascending' and 'descending' to Israel. On the one hand these

peregrinations are always personal and determined in the matrix of self, family, and career. On the other hand, these books suggest the presence of tribes, larger communities whose experiences are beginning to come into the public ken. The numbers of Americans who have moved to Israel and the Israelis who have left to settle elsewhere now each number in the hundreds of thousands. To a strikingly large extent, Jewish identity has become pegged to geography.

As the point of departure or the terminus for these trajectories, Israel sheer symbolic weight coupled with the concrete realities of life in the country sets people in motion and sets up an interesting and still evolving contrast between the pro-aliyah rhetoric that informs a certain ideologically active component of the American Jewish community and the Israeli Diaspora, which while acting from a very different set of concerns nevertheless are put in directional opposition through the term *yeridah*. Both of these adumbrate the importance of Israel as a space that generates debates over authenticity, but they do so at one remove, by tracking push and pull and putting Israel in relation to other geographies the world over.

***Here I Am: Where Are We?***

What happens when a geography is undone? The clearest sign that the full resources of Israel as an imagined space that serves as crucible and litmus test for questions and conundrums of Jewish authenticity have not yet been tapped is the forthcoming publication of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Here I Am*, a novel of nearly six hundred pages that eventually but essentially takes Israel to be a major subject. Safran Foer wheels out a dual frame to give the novel both granular focus and a broad thematic horizon. *Here I Am*, whose title and cuttingly current allusions firmly situate it in the contemporary, nevertheless points towards a future in Jewish American literature by imagining a counterfactual past.

No work of Jewish American literature since *Operation Shylock* has put Israel so at the center of its plot and its imaginative compass. While Roth's earlier book entertained the possibility of all the Jews in Israel leaving the Middle East and returning to Europe, Foer's novel goes one massive step forward: he imagines the State itself destroyed.

Safran Foer is not the only writer to execute the Ayatollah Khomeini's persistent fantasy and obliterate Israel. Most recently, Michael Chabon's *Yiddish Policeman's Union* (2007) takes Alaska to be the Holy Land 2.0, after the disappearance of the Middle East version. But while Chabon's book is solidly in the realm of genre fiction and works through a kind of zany caricature, Safran Foer's is plausible at every step, and set not in an alternative future but a slightly altered present. The destruction of Israel is presented as a serious possibility, with large swaths of the book devoted to discussing implications and reverberations.



Safran Foer has imagined and indeed enacted the State as a space at risk of being cancelled and undone. *Here I Am* imagines ‘There it Went,’ or ‘It Used To Be,’ putting Israel in a state of literary and literal peril.

Safran Foer’s intentions are clear from the first page. Consider the jarring opening line of the six hundred-page book: “When the destruction of Israel commenced, Isaac Bloch was weighing whether to kill himself or move to the Jewish home.”

Foer starts with small-scale dissolution before moving on to larger scale destruction. Unhappy families have been grist for the mill for novels for as long as people have been writing and unhappy, and *Here I Am* is a worthy contribution to that dour company. Foer gives us four generations of the Bloch family. Isaac is a Holocaust survivor at the end of his life. Irv, Isaac’s son, has acquired some notoriety as a right wing blogger and incendiary conservative. Jacob, Irv’s son, is a writer (we’re told that he’s won “a National Jewish Book Award”) who currently writes for a popular show vaguely analogous to *Game of Thrones*. His wife, Julia, is an architect, and they have three young sons. One on level, *Here I Am* is the slow motion collapse of this family, tracing how Julia and Jacob’s marriage implodes even as their sons grow.

If developments on the home front comprise slower moving entropy, developments in Israel are rapid and dramatic. Alongside the undoing of the Bloch family, Safran Foer stages a catastrophe in the Holy Land, as an enormous earthquake rocks the entire Middle East. It reduces the West Bank to rubble and cuts out electricity across Israel, precipitating a humanitarian crisis. In the meantime, the surrounding states in the region mobilize en masse against Israel, an echo to the run up to the 1967 Six Day War. The situation is aggravated by reports of a fire on the Temple Mount, which stokes the ever-present fears of a large-scale religious conflagration.

What does it mean when an American Jewish writer shares a fantasy with that of the Iranian Supreme Leader. On the one hand, the collapse of Israel as a space is not a neutral conjecture, especially after a century in which horrifically impossible became unfathomable reality. What does it mean when an American Jewish writer shares a fantasy with that of the Iranian Supreme Leader?: Israel's destruction precipitates a whole host of calculations on the part of the Bloch family about their relationship to Israel, Jewishness, and their own family history. Entertaining the possibility of Israeli extinction allows Foer to suss out the nooks and crannies of Jewish American identity and the limits of American Zionism. To paraphrase a lyric from a recent song by Passenger, "you only know you love her when you let her go" ("Let Her Go"). But what kind of love? What are its boundaries? How does it jostle for priority with other commitments? The book's interest is in using this extreme scenario not to leap into fantasy but to dig deeper into the stressors and paradoxes already baked into the Jewish American relationship to Israel. *Here I Am*, which aspires to be a *Megillah* of a certain kind of Jewish American sensibility, builds its Rorschach test from the fever dreams of anti-Semites the world over.

Perhaps the book's final twist is that 'destruction' means something different than its face value. In Hebrew, the word translates to *churban*, which is the term used to describe the destruction of the first Two Temples in Jerusalem. It conveys absolute and total devastation, a laying waste that is primarily physical but that also sowed the seeds of a spiritual wasteland, and most recently has been used to describe the Holocaust, the *Shoah* of the Jews of Europe.

Safran Foer describes something different, and his redefinition of 'destruction' speaks volumes about Israel as an imagined space for American Jews to project and reflect their own values. It is worth quoting this section of *Here I Am* at length, because it hovers somewhere in

between Jacob's and Safran Foer's narrative voice, which is close to the marrow of the Jewish American(s) who authored and populate the book.

Israel wasn't *destroyed*- at least not in the literal sense. It remained a Jewish country, with a Jewish army, and borders only negligibly different from before the earthquake....Maybe it was worse to have survived, if continuing to *be* required destroying the reason to be. (539)

After a long recitation of the ways in which American Jews never "stopped caring," including vacations and tours and "*finding themselves*," Safran Foer gets to the nub of the matter: "But the feeling of having arrived, of finally finding a place of comfort, of being *home*, was disappearing" (539). Why? Jacob provides nearly a *minyan* of reasons. "For some," he explains, "it was the inability to forgive Israel's actions during the war...For other American Jews, it wasn't Israel's actions that created an emotional distance, but how those actions were perceived...For others, it was the discomfort of Israel being neither a scrappy underdog nor a bitty superpower...David was good. Goliath was good. But you'd better be one or the other" (540).

Sixty-eight years after the founding of the State and seventy years after the Holocaust, mere survival is no longer an absolute value. Encoded in that 'maybe' is the nagging sense that just surviving is no longer good enough, that preserving Jewish life and the Jewish polity is only worthwhile if the moral cost is not too high. There is virtue in this evaluation of the weakness of the imperative of pure survival, but there is also weakness in that virtue. As Ruth Wisse argues, Jews were slow to see the necessity of protecting what they achieved, and the matter of who is David and who is Goliath depends on who is doing the measuring.

Safran Foer's envisioning of disaster hews closely to the furrowed brows of contemporary worriers over the relationship between American Jews and Israel. The sense that Israel's policies

are growing increasingly discordant to American ears, and that the inability of the Jewish State to resolve its quarrel with the Palestinians only bodes further distance, is a common bit of conventional wisdom. As Peter Beinart observed in *The Crisis of Zionism*, “For several decades the Jewish Establishment has asked American Jews to check their liberalism at Zionism’s door, and now, to their horror, they are finding that many young Jews have checked their Zionism instead” (NYRB, June 10 2010). Safran Foer’s fictional earthquake exposes already extant fault lines, and presages not so much a realignment as an intensified readjustment.

While a full accounting of these developments is beyond the scope or concern of this project, the novels here are etched with the anxieties and aspirations of American Jews vis a vis Israel. In broad strokes, there are two narratives that seek to explain the relation between American Jews and Israel. The first camp, occupied by pundits like Peter Beinart, Dov Waxman, and those broadly positioned on the left, including the presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders, correlates American attitudes with Israeli policy. According to this account, American Jewry has become ‘progressively’ distanced from a rightward drift in the Israeli polity and the dogged persistence of the settlement enterprise. By this logic, a critical posture of American Jews towards Israel is both a result of the Jewish State’s positions and the best hope for positively impacting those positions. Jewish liberalism is just as ‘authentic’ as sympathetic tribalism.

As with any large and complex story, there are multiple ways to tell it, and another version goes like this. Jewish American attitudes towards Israel are actually not determined by Israeli policy, but rather by demographic trends internal to the Jewish American community. The attenuation and diffusion of Jewish identity via widespread intermarriage and decrease in traditional observance and literacy are the key developments, and it is the changing nature of

American Jews that dictates how they conceptualize with and connect to Israel. Abrams succinctly articulates this position

the beginning of wisdom is surely to understand that the problem is *here*, in the United States. The American Jewish community is more distant from Israel than in past generations because it is changing, is in significant ways growing weaker, and is less inclined and indeed less able to feel and express solidarity with other Jews here and abroad.

The problem is not the challenges and abuse of sovereignty, but rather the trials of the diaspora. The necessary critique is not of Israel's government or its policies, but rather of the priorities and trajectory of American Jewry. This perspective is both more fatalistic about the future of the relationship of American Jewry to Israel, and more defensive of the measures Israel takes in self-defense. Even as Safran Foer vocalizes the first position by hinting that the drift in his fictional world is due to drastic measures adopted in the wake of the earthquake, he implicitly builds the case for the second through his exposition of the cares and concerns of the Bloch's, which seem largely asymptotic from the ultimate fate of Jewish State. Still, it is to Safran Foer's credit as a novelist that his large novel does not come down too heavily on either side of these scales. Jacob is not quite sure how he feels, and throughout Israel's position is depicted sympathetically if not exactly fervently. The erosion of the physical terrain of the physical space forces the Bloch's to wander through their own mental map of sympathies and allegiances.

There is something strange about a novel about Israel that is able to imagine it most fully only in its destruction. In a review first published in *The New Republic* and subsequently reprinted in a recent book of essays, Cynthia Ozick turns her formidable moral imagination towards the ethics of imagining horrors (*The New Republic*, October 30, 2014). Is contemplating the destruction of Israel an act of conjectured cruelty, or a sobering playing out of a plausible

scenario? Seen from one angle, it seems most similar to the kind of war games and training exercises undertaken by militaries the world over; hoping for the best and preparing for the worst.

Jacob prepares for the worst, going to the airport in response to the Prime Minister of Israel's call for Jewish men the world over to fly to Israel and aid the besieged country: "looking directly into the camera, and directly into the Jewish souls of all Jews watching, he conveyed the unprecedented threat to Israel's existence, and asked that Jewish men between the ages of sixteen and fifty "come home." The repetitions of "Jews," and the quotes around "come home" suggest a highly self-conscious spotlighting of the claims Israel makes, which are both highly pitched and highly contestable. Safran Foer's highly hypothetical worst-case scenario is just plausible enough to call due all the promissory notes the Diaspora has made to the defense of Israel. To drive this point home, the book features a leaked memorandum by the Israeli government outlining strategic responses to the catastrophe that annotates the age-old dichotomy of homeland and diaspora with a realpolitik revision:

While the war has exposed a widening gap between American and Israeli leadership, and between American and Israeli Jews, Israel will, with the proper public relations campaign, culminating with a speech delivered by the prime minister, persuade 100,000 American Jewish men to come to Israel to support the war effort...the president of the United States could watch eight million Jews be slaughtered, but not 100,000 American Jews (287).

Lingering in the background of the response to this crisis are the bitter lessons learned during the last one, when the petitions to President Franklin Roosevelt to bomb the train tracks to Auschwitz went unheeded: that failure has entered Jewish memory as a bitter reminder of general callousness to the fate of the Jews and the attendant need for Jewish self-defense. It is one of the resounding ironies of Jewish history since the Holocaust that political independence

has both changed the equation for Jewish geo-political strategy and involved reentering the familiar groove of Great Power negotiation and propitiation.

Israel's strategy is a success, seen from a certain angle. The experiment in Jewish sovereignty is preserved, although fewer Jews than anticipated leave the suburbs and downtowns of the Diaspora, it is enough. Many of those who do go die, but after the Holocaust and Israel's ongoing casualties, Safran Foer shows how Jewish loss of life has found a genre; Jacob's eyes scan over the memorial names on the wall of his synagogue, newly full with those lost in this most recent conflict. Jacob didn't go over *there* to fight, and that ultimately means his name isn't *there* on the *Yahrzeit* Wall. Jacob sustains a loss of meaning, however. "I had written books and screenplays my entire adult life," he reflects, "but it was the first time I'd felt like a character inside one- that the scale of my tchotchke existence, the *drama* of living, finally befitted the privilege of being alive" (484). And still, he doesn't go.

Safran Foer brings American Jewry and the fate of the Jews of Israel as close as they have ever been in mainstream American fiction, but Jacob's decision not to go fight is also Safran Foer's authorial decision to swerve from a final convergence. Israel is central to the plot but is always situated offstage: just when the action seems poised to move there, it is reeled back to suburban DC. The destruction of Israel is peripheral in other ways as well. Throughout the book it is received in snatches of breaking news, background radio bulletins, and choppy cell phone calls. The presence of that space at the margins is what precipitates the crisis in authenticity that makes Jacob first commit to going to Israel, and then decide to stay back. *Where* he is ultimately determines *who* he is, and finally takes the reader to the book's unpunctuated title, *Here I Am*. Figuring out whether it needs a period, exclamation point, or

question mark involves decoding the deictic “here.” The Abrahamic echo in Safran Foer’s title harkens back to the first Jew, who defined his identity in relation to a place to which he had never been, and said “Here I Am” not quite knowing where he would be called to pitch his tent and sing the song of his new self.



## Works Consulted

"A Portrait of American Jewry." Pew Research Center. Oct 1, 2013.

Adorno, Theodor. *The Jargon of Authenticity*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Ahern, Rachel. "The American Settler You Don't Know." *Haaretz English*, Oct 7, 2011.

Aviv, Caryn and David Shneer. *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*. New York: NYU Press, 2005.

Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

Baugh, Bruce. "Authenticity Revisited." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol. 46, No. 4 (Summer, 1988), pp. 477-487

Bellow, Saul. *To Jerusalem and Back*. New York: Penguin, 1998.

Beinart, Peter. "The Crisis of Zionism." *New York Review of Books*. June 10, 2010.

Ben-David, Laurie. *Moving Up: An Aliyah Journal*. New York: Mazo Publishers, 2006.

Berman, Marshall. *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Rise of Modern Society*. New York: Verso, 2009.

Bershtel, Sara and Allen Graubard. *Saving Remnants: Feeling Jewish in America*. New York: Free Press, 1992.

Bezmozgis, David. *The Betrayers*. New York: Little, Brown, 2014.

---. "The End of Jewish American Literature, Again." *Tablet Magazine*. Sept. 19, 2014.

Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Booth, William. "Here's What Happens When Some Famous Writers Went to Visit Some Hardcore Jewish Settlers." *The Washington Post*. May 7, 2016.

Borschel-Dan, Amanda. "Young Diaspora Jews Ponder Whether To Put A Ring On It With Israel." *Times of Israel*, August 10, 2015.

Charme, Stuart. "Varieties of Authenticity in Contemporary Jewish Identity." *Jewish Social Studies*. Vol. 6, No. 2 (Winter, 2000), pp. 133-155.

Clifford, James. *Routes: Travels and Translation in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Cohen, Debra. "How Many Israelis are in America? Let Us Count the Ways to Answer That."

*Haaretz*. July 20 2015.

Cooper, Alan. Philip Roth and the Jews. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996.

DeKoven Ezrahi, Sidra. Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Elliott, Justin. "WikiLeaks Revealing Information About U.S. Citizens Living in West Bank." *Salon*, August 24, 2011.

Englander, Nathan. *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank*. New York: Knopf, 2012.

Englard, Zahava. *Settling for More: From Jersey to Judea*. Teaneck: Dvora Publishing, 2010.

Feige, Michael. Settling in the Heart: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories.

Feldman, Kiera. "Living the American Dream in the West Bank." *Vice Media*, January 17, 2013.

Friedman, Matti. Pumpkinflowers. Chapel Hill: Algonquin, 2016.

---. "An Insider's Guide to the Most Important Story on Earth." *Tablet Magazine*. August 26, 2014.

Friedman, Robert. Zealots for Zion: Inside Israel's West Bank Settlement Movement. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 1994.

Furman, Andrew. Israel Through the Jewish-American Imagination, 1928-1995. Albany: SUNY Press, 1997.

Gavron, Assaf. The Hilltop. New York: Scribner, 2014.

Gavron, Daniel. The Kibbutz: Awakening from Utopia. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Gold, Nora. Fields of Exile. Toronto: Dundrum, 2014.

Golomb, Jacob. *In Search of Authenticity: Existentialism from Kierkegaard to Sartre*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Gordis, Daniel. *Home To Stay: One Families Chronicles of Miracles and Struggles in Contemporary Israel*. New York: Broadway Books, 2003.

--- Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn. New York: Ecco, 2016.

Gorenberg, Gershom. *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements 1967-77*. New York: Times Books, 2006.

---. *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*. New York: Free Press, 2000.

---. *The Unmaking of Israel*. New York: Harper, 2011.

Halkin, Hillel. *Letters to An American Jewish Friend: A Zionist's Polemic*. New York: Gefen, 2013.

---. *Yehuda Halevi*. New York: Schocken, 2010.

Hertzberg, Arthur. *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*. Philadelphia: JPS, 1997.

Hirschhorn, Sara Yael. "The Origins of the Redemption in Occupied Suburbia? The Jewish-American Makings of the West Bank Settlement of Efrat, 1973-87." *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51:2, 269-84.

Hope, Jessamyn. *Safekeeping*. New York: Fig Tree Books, 2015.

*Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*. Ed. Julia Branch. London: Routledge, 2008.

Kelner, Shaul. *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism*. New York: NYU Press, 2010.

Kirsch, Adam. *Why Trilling Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

Klein Halevi, Yossi. *Like Dreamers: The Story of Israel's Paratroopers who Reunited Jerusalem and Divided a Nation*. New York: Harper, 2014.

---. *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist: The Story of a Transformation*. New York: Harper, 2014.

Koltun-Fromm, Ken. *Imagining Authenticity: Vision and Text in American Jewish Thought*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015.

Krauss, Nicole. *Great House*. New York: Norton, 2011.

Krauthammer, Charles. "At Last, Zion: Israel and the Fate of the Jews." *The Weekly Standard*. May 11, 1998.  
fffff

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

- Leibovits, Liel. Aliya: Three Generations of Jewish-American Immigration to Israel. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005.
- Lindholm, Charles. *Culture and Authenticity*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007.
- Makovsky, David. "Breaking Ranks in Occupied Scarsdale. *US News and World Report*, Vol. 119 No. 7.
- Mann, Barbara. Space and Place in Jewish Studies. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2012.
- Meroney, John. "Political Strategist is Now a Job That Pays Big Money to Tell Candidates to be Themselves." *Playboy Magazine*. February 9, 2016.
- Michener, James. The Source. New York: Fawcett, 1994.
- Miller Budick, Emily. Ideology and Jewish Identity in Israeli and American Literature. Albany: SUNY Press, 2001.
- Nevo, Eshkol. Neuland. London: Chatto & Windus, 2014.
- Noy, Chaim. Israeli Backpackers: A View from Afar. Albany: SUNY Press, 2006.
- Oren, Michael. Ally: My Journey Across the American-Israeli Divide. New York: Random House, 2015.
- . Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East. Random House: New York, 2002.
- Oz, Amos. *In The Land of Israel*. New York: Mariner, 1993.
- . *Jews and Words*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Ozick, Cynthia. "There Were No Love Stories in Auschwitz. Is It Okay For a Novelist To Invent One?" *The New Republic*. October 30, 2014.
- Passenger. "Let Her Go." *All the Little Lights*. Black Crow Records, 2012.
- Pierpont, Claudia Roth. Roth Unbound: A Writer and His Books. New York: FSG, 2013.
- Potter, Andrew. *The Authenticity Hoax: How We Get Lost Finding Ourselves*. New York: Harper, 2010.
- Reich, Tova. Master of the Return. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1988.
- . The Jewish War. New York: Pantheon, 1995.

Ross, Dennis. Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama. New York: FSG, 2015.

Roth, Philip. Portnoy's Complaint. New York: Random House, 1967.

---. Operation Shylock. New York: Vintage, 2004.

---. The Counterlife. New York: FSG, 1986.

Sacks, Jonathan. *One People: Tradition, Modernity, and Jewish Unity*. New York: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993.

Safran Foer, Jonathan. Here I Am. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Anti-Semite and Jew*. New York: Schocken, 1995.

Sasson, Theodore. The New American Zionism. New York: NYU Press, 2015.

Senor, Dan and Saul Singer. Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle. New York: Twelve, 2001.

Shavit, Ari. My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015.

Shokeid, Moshe. Children of Circumstance: Israeli Immigrants in New York. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988

Soja, Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other-Real-and-Imagined- Places. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Steiner, George. "Our Homeland, the Text." *Salmagundi*, No. 66 (Winter-Spring 1985) pp. 4-25

Sullivan, Margaret. "The Conflict and the Coverage." *The New York Times*. Nov. 22, 2014.

Taub, Gadi. The Settlers and the Struggle Over the Meaning of Zionism. New Haven: 2010.

Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

*There is Simply Too Much To Think About: Saul Bellow's Collected Non-Fiction*. Ed Benjamin Taylor. New York: Viking, 2015.

Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.

Tsabari, Ayelet. The Best Place on Earth. New York: HarperCollins, 2013.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience. Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota Press, 1977.

Van Leeuwen, Theo. "What is Authenticity?" *Discourse Studies*. Vol. 3, No. 4 pp. 392-7.

Waxman, Chaim. *American Aliyah: Portrait of An Innovative Migration Movement*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989.

Waxman, Dov. Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict Over Israel. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Wikileaks, "Cable 05TELAVIV346, SNAPSHOT OF A WEST BANK AMCIT SETTLER, January 20 2005."

Wisse, Ruth. If I Am Not for Myself: The Liberal Betrayal of the Jews. New York: Free Press, 2001.

--- Jews and Power. New York: Schocken, 2007.

---. "The Herd of Independent Minds." *Mosaic Magazine*. Nov. 5, 2014.

Yin, David. "Out of Israel, Into the World." *Forbes*. 12/19/03.

Zertal, Idith and Akiva Eldar. Lords of the Land: The War Over Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-2007. New York: Nation Books, 2007.

Ziv, Oren. "Q&A- Michael Chabon Talks Occupation, Injustice, and Literature after Visit To the West Bank." *The Forward*. April 26, 2016.

